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ABSTRACT

This book develops a framework to help policymakers and policy analysts understand and judge policy options, so they can construct alternatives to the reorganization of rural, small school districts. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the book by stating the objectives and providing working definitions for "school district reorganization" and "rural, small school district." Chapter 2 highlights six major historical and contemporary pressures that will affect rural schools in the future, including socioeconomic changes detrimental to rural development, broader legal definition of state responsibilities for education, redirection of school excellence movement, and diverse changes in public opinion on education reform. Priority issues are presented in Chapter 3, for example, "concentrating on the characteristics of effective schools" and "responding to the realities of the information age." Chapter 4 considers the criteria that ought to be used in the formulation of a state's strategic policy goals for rural education and the policy instruments available to translate goals into tactical objectives and action plans. A range of policy options identified in Chapter 5 address the new pressures on state systems of elementary-secondary education. Chapter 6 concludes with a brief discussion of the hypothesized effects of the use of each option. This book contains numerous tables and figures, and approximately 200 references. (KS)

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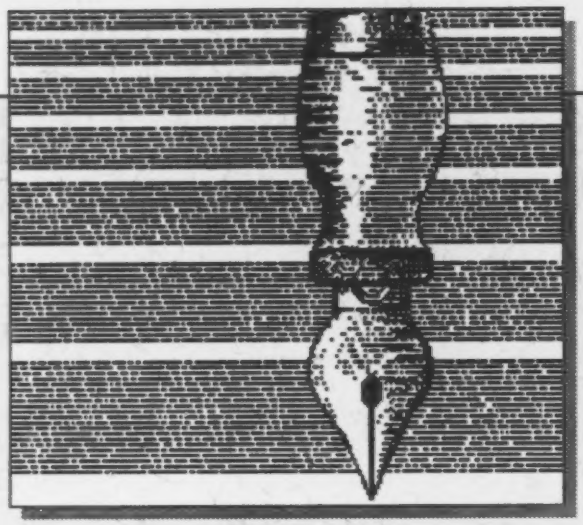

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E. Robert Stephens, Ph.D.

A Joint Publication of

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Department of Education Policy, Planning, and Administration
College of Education, University of Maryland, College Park

March 1991

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Appalachia Educational Laboratory

and

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Charleston, West Virginia

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Table of Contents

List of Figures *v*
List of Tables *v*
Preface: Policy, Power, and Rural Education *vi*
Acknowledgements *viii*
Executive Summary *ix*

Chapter One: Introduction 1

Chapter Two: "New" Pressures on the States to (Again) Address the Needs of Rural, Small School Districts 7
- The Unkind Decade of the 1980s 7
- Lack of Support for Mandated District Reorganization 14
- Greater Acceptance of the Public Choice Theory 21
- The Need for a Recommitment to the Concept of "All One System" 22

Chapter Three: What Ought to be the Focus of "New" State Priorities? 29
- The Need to View the Rural School District as a System 29
- The Need to Address the Diversity Among Rural School Districts 32
- The Need to Address Traditional Problems 34
- The Need to Concentrate on the Characteristics of Effective Schools 38
- The Need to Stress the New National Goals for Education 39
- The Need to Concentrate on the Requirements of the Information Age 40
- The Need to Emphasize Student Performance Accountability 40
- The Need to Make the Rural School the Community Learning Center 41
- The Need to Redefine the State-Local Partnership Concept 43

Chapter Four: Other Important Considerations in the Selection of Alternative Policies 49
- The Choice of Criteria for the Selection of Alternatives 49
- The Availability of State Policy Instruments 52

Chapter Five: Major State Policy Options 59
- The Eight Featured Policy Options 59
- Promoting Interdistrict Relations 61
- Promoting School District-Postsecondary Relations 63
- Promoting School Dsitrict-Other Local Interorganizational Relations 65
- Promoting School District Partnerships 66

Expanding Direct State Services 66
Using Distance Learning Technologies 67
Changing the Financial Support Base of Rural Education 69
Allowing Greater Local School District Discretionary Authority 72

Chapter Six: Estimating Effects (An Illustrative Application) 77
The Need to Apply the Framework 77
Estimating Effects by Options' Ability to Address State Priorities 78
Estimating Effects by Ability to Meet Policy Selection Criteria 84
Estimating Effects by Compatibility with Policy Instruments 85

Afterword: Applying What We Know 93

List of Figures

1 Decline in the Number of Basic Administrative Units, 1931-32 to Fall 1987 19

2 One View of the Universal Properties of a School District 31

3 The Three Approaches Used to Illustrate the Hypothesized Effects of the Use of the Eight State Policy Options 79

4 Focus of Approach #1: Hypothesized Effects of the Use of Policy Options When Judged Against Ability to Address State Priorities 81

5 Focus of Approach #3: Hypothesized Effects of the Use of Policy Options When Judged Against Primary Policy Instrument(s) Required to Implement 88

List of Tables

1 Number and Percent of Public Schools and Enrollment by Type of Locale, 1987-88 School Year 4

2 Percent Small Town and Rural Enrollment and Schools, 1987-88 School Year 5

3 Basic Types of Public Local School Districts 15

4 Changes in the Number of Governmental Units, 1942-1987 20

5 Nachtigal's Three Categories of Rural Communities 33

6 Characteristics of Policy Instruments 53

7 Assumptions and Consequences of Policy Instruments 54

8 A Modified Typology of State Policy Instruments 56

9 Hypothesized Effects of the Use of Policy Options When Judged Against Their Ability to Address State Priorities 82

10 Hypothesized Effects of the Use of Policy Options When Judged Against Their Ability to Address State Policy Selection Criteria 85

11 Hypothesized Effects of the Use of Policy Options When Judged Against Primary Policy Instrument(s) Required to Implement 89

Preface:
Policy, Power, and Rural Education

Policymakers are often sharply criticized for a perceived failure to meet the needs of students and educators in rural, small school districts. In particular, critics decry efforts to establish (and enforce) minimum or optimum district sizes.

So far as such contention goes, critics obviously have an easier time of it than the policymakers. After all, the policymakers, and not their critics, must come up with a course of action to be followed. And for any course of action, there will always be those who respond, "Don't do it!" Sometimes, the critics are numerous, and, sometimes, they have valid arguments (features of public outcry that do not, however, always coincide).

In this context, policy options are important. Right now policymakers need alternatives to the reorganization of rural, small school districts—more than they have in recent memory. There are two reasons.

For one thing, new evidence is beginning to suggest that small organizational scale may—under conditions that need to be better understood—benefit students both cognitively and affectively. In the future, Americans might see the creation of *smaller* school districts, rather than *larger* ones. The recent subdivision of Chicago into hundreds of small districts is a stunning case in point.

For another thing, a great deal of reorganization has taken place already: There is much less to reorganize, at least with the intent of making school districts larger. In some rural areas, consolidated school districts may cover thousands of square miles, but still serve very few students in grades K-12. In other rural areas, difficult terrain may make it dangerous to transport students very far, so schools and districts stay small.

This book develops a framework to help policymakers and policy analysts understand and judge policy options, so they can construct alternatives to the reorganization (especially the "forced" reorganization) of rural, small school districts. The word "forced" is used advisedly—earlier drafts of this book used the term in the title, to the consternation of some who read that draft. This book nonetheless acknowledges that reorganization has often, if not always, taken place over local opposition.

A view of political power, however, does figure prominently in this discussion, and the author takes an historical approach. The relevant issue is the local control of schools. Professor Stephens reminds readers that the decentralized nature of our system of schooling reflects the traditional ideological commitment of Americans to institutions that are close to the people.

This important point is often overlooked in discussions about education. It concerns the "balance" that characterizes the American political system. This balance derives not only from the way the three branches of government implement "checks" on the others, but from the way in which local power balances—certainly this is true of some recent attempts to reorganize school districts—and *checks* centralized political power. If our nation loses this balance, what else might we lose?

Perhaps innovation, responsiveness, enterprise, and individuality do characterize what is best about the American experience. According to many observers, liberal and conservative alike, these qualities are inherent in our traditionally decentralized approach to power. Loss of local control may threaten the best features of our national character.

There *is* a dilemma, however. The world is shrinking, the press of national solidarity is greater, and a view of human beings as instruments of economic destiny is more commonplace. These international trends contribute to the emerging consensus that national systems of education need to cultivate an educated work force to safeguard economic and political progress. The dilemma for the various states and for the nation as a whole is how to achieve such ends and simultaneously bring about a policy structure that is responsive to conditions among local schools and school districts. Professor Stephens' call for a more reasoned—as well as more reasonable—partnership between local and state education agencies is a balanced approach to this dilemma. Responsive schools, after all, give students access to two perspectives on life, where they are coming from and where they want to go. Neither perspective makes much sense without the other. Moreover, our own ability to make this kind of sense (for ourselves and for our students) may disappear if we cannot work out partnerships that restore some measure of local power.

The challenge, as Professor Stephens indicates, is what it always is: the *responsible* exercise of power. We believe this book will help federal, state, and local policymakers meet that challenge.

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Executive Summary

During the 1980s public attention focused on the need to "reform," "restructure," and generally overhaul American education, as a principal ally in the effort to restore a spirit of competitiveness to the national character. At the same time, a series of events—including litigation—has made it increasingly clear to state policymakers that rural schools are a visible, and important, part of state educational systems.

But the rural America of the present is vastly different from the sentimental image cherished by many citizens. Only a small minority of rural citizens is engaged in agriculture, and rural communities are no longer so stable as they may once have been. If the objectives of reform, restructuring, and competitive outlook are to be achieved, then policymakers must fashion appropriate ways to address rural needs.

Developing a Framework for Policymakers

This book gives federal, state, and local policymakers who must wrestle with "the rural problem" a framework for viewing the relevant issues. It also illustrates application of the framework to the critical task of selecting policy options appropriate to the needs of rural, small school districts.

The framework developed in this book comprises four parts:

- historical and contemporary realities (see Chapter 2),
- new priorities to focus state policy response (see Chapter 3),
- tools to judge the ends and means of policymaking (see Chapter 4), and
- major policy options that hold promise for rural districts (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Historical and contemporary realities. School districts in rural areas are now feeling the impact of six major historical and contemporary realities—new pressures that will affect rural schools for the foreseeable future:

- socioeconomic trends causing great stress in much of rural America,
- redirection of the school excellence movement,
- emerging legal definitions of states' responsibilities for education,
- obsolescence of traditional responses to rural education needs,
- increased interest in public choice, and
- the conception of education as a single system.

The historical context of local government—of which school districts are one type—is especially important, because it helps explain why traditional responses to rural education needs are losing their appeal.

New priorities. A number of issues will probably affect choices that state and local policymakers consider in this new decade. These issues are likely to constitute priorities in the foreseeable future:

- developing the rural school district as a system,
- responding to the diversity among rural districts,
- addressing rural schools' traditional difficulties,

- concentrating on the characteristics of effective schools,
- emphasizing the newly formulated national goals of education,
- responding to the realities of the information age,
- stressing student performance accountability,
- expanding rural schools into community learning centers, and
- redefining the concept of state and local partnership.

Tools for policymaking. Observers often comment that the roots of policymaking are obscure. Policymaking takes place in a politicized atmosphere fraught with dangers for participants, and decisions often seem to emerge through some "nonrational" process. Although such observations are valid, it is clear that the public does judge policies once they are implemented. Tools for making policy include (1) criteria by which to assess policy options and (2) instruments available to implement policy.

Criteria include:

- cost-effectiveness,
- cost per benefit,
- equity,
- adequacy,
- responsiveness, and
- appropriateness.

Available policy instruments include:

- mandates,
- inducements,
- capacity-building,
- system-changing, and
- advocacy.

Major policy options. Major options are the stuff of policymaking—the courses of action that might be implemented. The options considered here do not exhaust all the possibilities. At the same time, they are among those most often cited by experts in researching and developing strategies and techniques for dealing with the challenges of providing instruction in small, isolated, or impoverished rural areas. The eight options in the framework entail:

- interdistrict relations,
- relations with postsecondary institutions,
- relations with other local organizations,
- partnerships,
- direct state services,
- distance learning technologies,
- changes in methods of school finance, and
- discretionary authority.

The framework can provide for a number of kinds of analysis, but one method is illustrated by the author. Valid use of the framework, however, requires the participation of relevant stakeholders assessing conditions in each state. The illustrative analysis developed in Chapter 6 applies to no actual system. Moreover, elements of each dimension of the framework can be changed, either to respond to state-specific conditions or to other views of policymaking. In fact, such reconstruction of the framework, in the context of collaboration among policymakers and other stakeholders, is absolutely necessary. The framework is not a "one best system" of any sort.

Fitting means to ends is, perhaps, the essential challenge of policymaking. The framework developed in this book gives policymakers—and those who study policymaking as it applies to rural education—a conceptual model for adapting means (available policy options) to ends (for example, priority issues).

CHAPTER ONE:
Introduction

THE NEED for an effective state system of public elementary-secondary education has taken on added importance in recent years as the executive and legislative branches of state government have seemingly rediscovered the close connection between a viable state system of education and the prospects for economic development. It is generally acknowledged that the importance of education for the promotion of economic development efforts has fueled the unprecedented wave of school reform that has swept the nation for much of the past decade (DeYoung, 1989).

Interest in the increasingly difficult urban component of state systems of schools, of course, remains high. However, the quality of the rural school district sector of state systems has historically occupied—and continues to occupy—the disproportionate attention of those concerned about the effectiveness of the total system. There is good reason for this concern, as many observers have argued: Rural systems, despite huge reductions in their number over the years, still represent a sizable proportion of districts in many states and are to be found in all states, even the most urbanized. Many of these continue to have to deal with a number of traditional problems generally recognized as affecting the quality of education. Especially troublesome are the frequently common issues of a lack of depth and breadth in the instructional program, the recruitment and retention of staff, and inadequate financial resources. The fact that most of these problems are endemic to the small-scale operations of rural districts or their relative isolation is to some of no matter.

To these longstanding needs are to be added new pressures caused by the most recent conflux of major economic and social changes in rural America that together promise to reshape the vast and diverse nonmetropolitan regions of the nation. Such numerous changes, it follows, impact rural schools, perhaps in irreversible ways. The simultaneous convergence of these economic and social changes in the decade of the 1990s, some of them probably cyclical, but others of a more enduring nature, clearly complicate the prospects of maintaining a viable rural school component within state systems of elementary-secondary education, which, once again, comprise a significant portion of districts in many states.

Further, many rural school systems that are now strong will meet ever-increasing difficulty as they try to remain strong. Weaker rural districts will, in the future, be even less likely to meet minimal expectations or acceptable norms.

In earlier times, up until approximately the mid-1960s, the primary state response to the widely perceived "rural school problem" was the adoption of a policy goal of creating systems with larger enrollments by reducing the number of rural districts—either through mandated school district reorganization, or through the use of a variety of incentives (or disincentives) to achieve the same end. School district reorganization, especially *mandated* reorganization, has unequivocally proven itself to be a quandary.

The quandary, however, stems from reasons other than the fact that mandated reorganization generates deep emotional opposition and heated debate, important as these considerations are in educational policymaking. Mandated reorganization has become a quandary mainly because the evidence of its effectiveness is increasingly recognized as mixed, at best. Moreover, the rationales advanced in earlier times—both for and against its use as a policy option for improving rural schools—have lost much of their clout, only to be superseded by other compelling

rationales in support of or in opposition to its use. Finally, there are, in fact, a number of other promising policy strategies *now available* to the state policy communities to strengthen rural schools. The existence of these strategies changes the parameters of the debate in important ways. In short, the entire question of reorganization seems to have been reconceived in recent decades.

But what are the available options and which of them, either singularly or in combination, would constitute an appropriate way to address the issues that formerly seemed to require mandated reorganization? Would the use of one or a combination of potential options, though serving rural students, detract from more fundamental efforts to improve the delivery of services in the state systems of elementary-secondary education? What criteria should be used in arriving at decisions concerning these and other issues? And what are the relative advantages and disadvantages of the use of these different criteria?

Multiple Objectives of This Book

This book is *not* an advocacy piece arguing against the use of mandated district reorganization as the prime state policy response for addressing the problems of rural, small schools. Similarly, this book does not argue for the adoption of *any* single or particular combination of state policies to achieve the goals for which reorganization has been promoted in the past. Alternative policy choices will—indeed, they must—ultimately be made on the basis of policy analyses specific to the individual states. Therefore, it would be of no value to argue here for some universal prescription with the expectation that this could be successfully applied in all states. Though others seem so inclined, this is not the case here. Rather, the objectives of the book are four in number.

The *first objective* is to provide a brief rationale for why a new, ambitious state policy response will be required in the 1990s. *Six pressures* on the states are highlighted in Chapter 2. Together, these six pressures clearly call for a comprehensive state response to the "rural school problem" if the promising beginnings of the school excellence movement are to enjoy long-term success.

The *second objective* is to establish what priorities are to be the focus of the required new state policy response. *Nine priority needs* generally applicable to all states are examined in Chapter 3.

The *third objective* is to review factors that ought to influence the selection of alternative state policies. Considered first, in Chapter 4, is the complex question of what *criteria* ought to be used in the formulation of a state's strategic policy goals for rural education. Then, the equally important concern about what *policy instruments* are available to the state in translating its strategic goals into tactical objectives and action plans is discussed. Both factors will undoubtedly loom large in the choice of a state's policy response.

The *fourth objective* is to identify, in Chapter 5, a range of policy options that could be used to address the new pressures on state systems of elementary-secondary education, and the generally applicable priorities that might constitute the focus of a state's policy response. Chapter 6 concludes with a brief discussion of the hypothesized effects of the use of each option.

And One Overriding Hope

One overriding hope cuts across all four of the objectives cited above. This hope centers on the use of the conceptual framework developed in this book, including its sample application in Chapter 6. My hope is that the framework, though broad, will nonetheless inform the subsequent, more detailed work that will be required if the states are to integrate the large number of considerations that must go into an individual state response.

The most desperate need at this juncture is for precisely such a work as this book presents: a useful conceptual and analytical framework that will encourage the development of the *best evidence* and *strongest arguments* for the selection of one policy choice, or combination of choices, rather than others.

Each state is different, and policies should differ accordingly. The process of policymaking, however, may have commonalities across states. Readers need not agree, for example, with the hypothesized effects of the use of different options that are provided in Chapter 6 (an unlikely event under most circumstances, as will be established later). What is critical is that a meaningful, internally logical conceptual frame-

work be used for policy analysis. The framework used here, I hope, holds promise for providing a useful approach to the complex policy question at hand.

Working Definitions

Two terms of special importance in this text are defined below. The first, "school district reorganization," is used rather than "school district consolidation" to describe the merger of two or more independent school systems into a new, single organizational or administrative entity. This is largely a personal choice. Both terms have been and continue to be used in the literature to describe the same merger process, just as both have been employed simultaneously over time by the courts and in state statutes.

Furthermore, both terms satisfy two important definitional criteria: They each possess conceptual clarity and descriptive validity. However, the two terms can be used to convey different meanings. I tend to limit the term "consolidation" to describe the combination of two or more attendance centers (e.g., high schools, elementary schools) within a single school district, and to reserve the more permanent-sounding term "reorganization" to denote the more extensive changes in governance and structure that take place when two formally independent school systems are merged into a new unified system.

The second key term in need of early clarification is how one should define a "rural, small school district." What I have in mind in the following discussion is a school district that enrolls fewer than 2,500 students and is located approximately 25 miles or more outside an urban center having a population of 50,000 or more (Stephens & Turner, 1988). This definition features an enrollment factor and an isolation factor, and it centers on two major considerations:

> The frequently used criterion of proximity to an SMSA [Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area] was judged to be of little utility because an SMSA includes an entire county having an urban center of 50,000 population and this would obscure the many situations across the country where there are numerous rural districts in counties that are designated as SMSAs. The argument advanced for the use of an enrollment criterion and that an upper limit of 2,500 is preferred is that districts with enrollments greater than this tend to have a different mix of programming, staffing, and in many cases, financial resources.
>
> (Stephens, 1987, p. 179)

Use of this working definition results in the estimate that approximately 57 percent of the nation's slightly more than 15,000 operating public school systems in the 1987-88 school year were rural, small systems—a sizable percentage. This estimate is in general agreement with others that make use of different criteria such as sparsity or density of population, economic and social features, or occupation of residents.[1] Approximately 20 percent, or one in five, of the nation's over 40 million public elementary-secondary students attend rural school districts, by the terms of the above definition.

In a large number of states, of course, both the percentage of students attending rural schools, as well as the number of rural districts, are substantially higher than the national estimates. Moreover, as suggested earlier, many of the nation's most populous states still have a sizable rural school component.

This latter point is illustrated by the valuable work underway at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education, which promises to provide insight into a whole range of rural school district definitional problems that have in the past hampered policy analysis and the construction of meaningful school district typologies. The NCES work classifies schools (based on zip codes)—not school districts at this point—into seven categories by type of locale (Johnson, 1989). The number and percent of schools (not school districts) and the number and percent of enrollment in attendance at the schools in each category for the nation in 1987-88 are presented in Table 1.

The work of the NCES is drawn upon here to establish the point that even the state systems with the largest enrollments have a substantial rural school component. The percent of small town and rural enrollment and schools for the eight state systems with the largest enrollments appear in Table 2. These states were those with enrollments exceeding 1.5 million students in 1987-88. The assumption is made here that many of the rural schools and a substantial number of the small-town schools in reality represent a single school district.

Table 1

Number and Percent of Public Schools and Enrollment by Type of Locale, 1987-88 School Year

Category	Schools		Enrollment	
	Number	Percent	Number (in 000s)	Percent
Large City central city of an SMSA, with the city having a population greater than or equal to 400,000 or a population density greater than or equal to 6,000 people per square mile	6,997	9	5,208	13
Mid-Size City central city of an SMSA, with a city having a population less than 400,000 and a population density less than 6,000 people per square mile	11,092	14	6,642	17
Urban Fringe of Large City place within an SMSA of a Large City and defined as urban by the U.S. Census Bureau	10,696	13	6,631	17
Urban Fringe of Mid-Size City place within an SMSA of a Mid-Size City as defined by Census	7,701	10	4,747	12
Large Town town not within an SMSA with a population greater than or equal to 25,000	1,828	2	968	2
Small Town town not within an SMSA with a population less than 25,000 and greater than or equal to 2,500 people	18,659	23	8,736	22
Rural a place with less than 2,500 people or a place having a ZIP Code designated as rural by Census	22,319	28	6,510	16

Source: Johnson, Frank. *Assigning Type of Locale Codes to the 1987-88 CCD Public School Universe.* Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, July, 1989 (Table 2, p.10).

Table 2
Percent Small Town and Rural Enrollment and Schools
1987-88 School Year

Eight Largest Enrollment Size State Systems	Number of Operating Local School Districts	Total Enrollment (in 000s)	Total Number of Schools	Small Town[a]		Rural[b]	
				Percent Enrollment	Percent Schools	Percent Enrollment	Percent Schools
California	1,024	4,489	7,123	11.71	15.08	4.73	9.90
Texas	1,074	3,237	5,787	21.68	24.64	12.67	23.64
New York	719	2,593	3,972	16.88	20.75	9.14	13.34
Illinois	982	1,811	4,262	14.83	17.79	11.55	24.47
Ohio	615	1,793	3,743	18.21	19.88	21.67	27.89
Florida[c]	67	1,664	2,379	12.41	14.80	7.04	8.87
Pennsylvania	550	1,641	3,314	31.53	33.07	16.24	20.67
Michigan	563	1,580	3,620	26.32	27.35	14.33	18.84

Notes:

a) Small Town — town not within an SMSA and with a population less than 25,000 and greater than or equal to 2,500 people.

b) Rural — a place with less than 2,500 people or a place having a ZIP Code designated rural by the U.S. Census Bureau.

c) In the State of Florida all local school districts are county systems.

Sources:

Johnson, Frank, *Assigning Type of Locale Codes to the 1987-88 CCD Public School Universe*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, July, 1989 (Tables B.1 and B.2, pp. 31-34).

Data on the number of operating school districts secured from *Rankings of the States, 1988*, Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1988 (Table B-1, p. 12).

Notes

1. A useful compilation of varying definitions of rural, small districts used by different federal and state agencies and by writers in the field was complied in the mid-1980s by the American Association of School Administrators (*Report on Definitions: Rural Community, Rural School District, Small School District*, no date).

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CHAPTER TWO:
"New" Pressures on the States to (Again) Address the Needs of Rural, Small School Districts

THE 1990s promise to pose great difficulties, as states will again be required to devote inordinate attention to the needs of the still large number of rural, small school districts that continue throughout the nation. A brief discussion of the nature of these pressures is provided below. Singled out for emphasis here are the following:

- the confluence in the 1980s of a number of socioeconomic trends that caused great stress in nonmetropolitan regions and promise to continue to do so in this decade;
- the school excellence movement underway since the early 1980s that shows clear signs of a redirection and new focus in the decade we are now entering;
- the emergence of new, much broader legal definitions of the state's constitutional responsibilities for education;
- the lack of widespread support for the use of the traditional state policy response for addressing the rural school "problem," mandated district reorganization;
- the greater acceptance of the concept of public choice theory; and
- the need for a recommitment to the concept of "all one system."

Certainly many states have for some time engaged in developing meaningful plans and programs to assist rural districts, other than mandating their reorganization. This is especially true of the past two to three decades. It would, however, seem that the set of circumstances now confronting rural districts—and by extension the state system of elementary-secondary education—will require, as never before, a new vision and creativity that will tax the staying power of state and local planners and decisionmakers.

The Unkind Decade of the 1980s

The 1980s were an especially stressful period for many nonmetropolitan or rural regions in the nation (these two terms are used interchangeably in this essay). In an earlier attempt to synthesize the major economic, social, and political trends impacting rural America for much of the troubling decade of the 1980s (Stephens, 1988), I cited 15 trends that appear to be of particular significance. A number of these that have special relevance to subsequent discussions in this book are reviewed below.

The accelerated interdependence in the 1980s of the economy of the United States with the economies of other nations is widely accepted. Henry, Drabenstott, and Gibson's (1986) discussion of the significance of this new reality for the rural economy in this nation stresses that the traditional economic activities of agriculture and energy production (oil, gas, coal, and lumber) that export or compete against imports were at a competitive disadvantage for most of the early part of the decade because of a strengthened dollar, lower foreign production costs in labor-intensive manufacturing, and increased international energy supplies (see pp. 36-37).

The shift in the 1980s from goods-producing to service-producing employment has also had inordinate negative consequences for nonmetropolitan regions (Brown & Deavers, 1987; Henry, Drabenstott,

& Gibson, 1986; Miller & Bluestone, 1987; Pulver, 1986). Largely as a result of industrial restructuring in the 1970s, rural economies tended to have a disproportionate representation of low-wage, labor-intensive industries (e.g., apparel, textiles, wood products, leather goods, shoes) (Brown & Deavers, 1987). These same industries were particularly vulnerable to the effects of international market forces in the 1980s.

As expected, nonmetropolitan unemployment rates for much of the decade were appreciably higher than in metropolitan regions (Brown & Deavers, 1987). Also as expected, the popularly labelled and unprecedented "rural population turnaround" of the 1970s, in which the rate of nonmetropolitan growth exceeded the metropolitan rate, did not hold for much of the decade. The population growth of nonmetropolitan regions in the aggregate was lower than that of metropolitan areas from 1980 to 1985 (Brown & Deavers, 1987). Approximately one-third (853) of the 2,383 nonmetro counties lost population in this time period. Population losses were most pronounced in the traditional agricultural areas of the midwest and Great Plains states (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1986, p. I.28).

The persistence of higher poverty rates in nonmetro counties held for much of the decade. Similarly, personal income of nonmetro county residents continued to significantly lag behind metropolitan regions (Henry, Drabenstott, & Gibson, 1986).

Many of these trends placed added fiscal pressures on rural local governments in their attempts to provide basic public services. Rural local governments have traditionally had difficulties providing community services due to their isolation and smaller populations (Rainey & Rainey, 1978). The depressed economies in both agriculture and the extraction industries for much of the decade compounded the loss of revenue sharing and other federal support systems and exacerbated the traditional difficulties of many rural local governments.

As this brief profile suggests, many parts of rural America are experiencing fundamental changes, perhaps unlike those in any comparable period in the history of this nation. The confluence of these circumstances pose the gravest threat to the quality of rural education in recent memory. They present state planners and decisionmakers an immediate challenge that is likely to have long-term significance for this nation.

Again, there presently are a large number of operating rural, small school districts across the nation and in every state. They enroll a relatively substantial number of students. While marketplace forces were not kind to much of rural America during the 1980s, still the states cannot turn their backs on these students and the districts where they are enrolled.

The Redirection of the School Excellence Movement

The second major new pressure on the states to address the needs of rural, small school districts stems from the increasingly apparent shift in the direction of the school excellence movement as we begin the decade of the 1990s.

The First Wave of Reform

The emphasis of the school excellence movement of the 1980s, the so-called "first wave" of school reform, is well documented (Bridgman, 1985; National Governors' Association, 1988; Pine, 1985; State Research Associates, 1988). In another piece (Stephens, 1988b), I argued that it was useful to view the focus of the intent of state legislative initiatives sponsored in the early part of the first wave (the approximate time period 1983-87) as following seven lines of corrective action deemed important.

The seven lines of intended action, along with common expressions of each, addressed improvement in:

(1) quality of the instructional program (e.g., increased graduation requirements, required student achievement testing, required programs for four year olds, longer school day/year, increased retention rates);

(2) competencies and skills of teachers (e.g., more stringent certification requirements, mandated staff development);

(3) quality of the teaching profession (e.g., more

selective entrance and more rigid program requirements for preparation programs, increased minimum salaries);

(4) quality of educational leadership (e.g., more rigid certification requirements for principals, mandated staff development);

(5) monitoring of the quality of school systems (e.g., increased accreditation standards, enactment of a form of state receivership for marginal or poorly performing districts);

(6) competition in public education (e.g., enactment of a form of family choice option); and

(7) structure of state school systems (e.g., forced district reorganization).

(Stephens, 1988b, p. 6)

The most recent approximate two-year period witnessed a continuation of intense legislative interest along many of these same lines, as well as the introduction of new legislative intent. During this period prominence was given to the need to strengthen:

(1) a number of academic subject matter areas (e.g., mathematics, science, foreign language);

(2) the use of computer technologies;

(3) programs for at-risk students;

(4) programs in early childhood education and day-care services;

(5) parental involvement; and

(6) school-based decisionmaking.

Not a great deal is known about the effects of any of these initiatives on rural, small school districts, in part because of the relative newness of many of them that were enacted by many state legislatures incrementally over the past several years.[1] However, the hypothesized effects of the initiatives offered by some close observers of rural schools have substantial face validity. For example:

- The move toward greater teacher certification specialization will mean that rural, small systems will experience staffing difficulties because of their need for staff with multiple teaching endorsements, a point stressed by Horn (1985).
- The mandating of additional course requirements in foreign language and advanced courses in the mathematics and sciences fields will make rural, small systems even more vulnerable to concerns about their cost effectiveness, a consideration stressed by Augenblick and Nachtigal (1985) and State Research Associates (1988).

The merits of many of the new reform initiatives are not being debated here. The point of this review of the first wave of the school excellence movement is to stress that many of the initiatives exacerbated a number of the traditional problems faced by small schools that are due in large part to conditions beyond their control—their isolation, their sparsity of population, and their frequent lack of adequate financial support.

The Redirection

The past few years represent what is perhaps the most intensive and prolonged period of assessment of public education in this nation's history. However, it seems clear that a redirection of the school excellence movement is well underway in the nation and that this tendency toward a redirection is likely to gain momentum in this decade. The consequences of this redirection will threaten many of the nation's rural, small school districts.

The centerpiece of the redirection is, of course, the press for more sophisticated student performance accountability systems, argued for most ardently by the National Governors' Association and many individual state governors. The specific features of what will ultimately become the norms of such state efforts are not yet established. However, it appears likely that the following components, which enjoy widespread support, will be fairly standard features:

- more comprehensive assessment programs to hold each school, school system, and the state accountable for student performance in a set of core areas;
- state standards for assessing student performance in a set of core areas;
- the use of accreditation programs—which will

make use of new, more meaningful indicators than was general in the past—to assess the overall quality of a school and school system's performance; and

- the use of sanctions against poorly performing schools and school systems.

One danger in the design of new student performance accountability systems, however, is that scant attention may be given to the real contextual differences among rural, small school districts. In an article devoted to the design of organizational effectiveness studies of rural schools, Stephens, Perry, and Sanders (1989) argue to this point:

> This will require adjustments that reflect demonstrable differences between rural, small school districts and urban or suburban education. What is the nature of these differences? Two distinctions relate to the reduced scale operation and isolation of many rural, small districts. Small enrollments require adjusting input indicators that focus on district expenditure patterns. Similarly, adjustment of process indicators that use community resources to enrich the instructional program would be necessary. In more isolated areas, many conventional opportunities of this type are absent.
>
> (Stephens, Perry, & Sanders, 1989, p. 20)

The second indication of a redirection in the school excellence movement is the adoption this year by the White House and the National Governors' Association of a joint statement on national education goals (National Education Goals, 1990). The six goals establish that by the end of the decade:

(1) all students in America will start school ready to learn;

(2) ninety percent of students will graduate from high school;

(3) students will demonstrate competency in English, mathematics, science, history, and geography;

(4) students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement;

(5) all adults will be literate and be able to compete in a global economy as well as exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and

(6) every school will be free of drugs and offer an environment conducive to learning.

These are ambitious national goals. Most will enjoy widespread public support. A number of them, however, can (again) exacerbate several of the traditional problems facing rural schools, unless massive, broad-based assistance is available. The ability of many rural schools to achieve them, especially as a result of the new difficulties they face due to the socioeconomic trends of the 1980s, is questionable.

New, Broader Legal Definitions of the State's Responsibility

The third source of new pressures on the states to address the issue of what to do about the mounting difficulties of rural, small districts is to be found in the new, broader legal definitions of the state's responsibilities in education. Before establishing what these seem to be, a brief review of the legal bases of the state's authority over education is provided.

The State's Legal Authority Over Education

In the United States, public education has been clearly established as a state function. Support for the concept of state responsibility for education is to be found in an evolving pattern of constitutional, statutory, and judicial decisions that together form the legal basis of education.

Thurston and Roe's (1957) work on the evolution of state school systems is one of a number of excellent statements on the principal early precedents that helped establish the state's responsibility for public education and is synthesized below:

- the enactment of the Massachusetts law of 1642, the first time under an English-speaking government that a legislative body representing the state ordered that all children should be taught to read;

- the enactment of the Massachusetts Law of 1647 ("The Old Deluder, Satan Act") that went a step

further by ordering a school system established and asserting the right of the state through legislation to require a community to establish and support schools under penalty of fine if they failed to do so;

- the enactment by the Continental Congress of the Northwest Ordinances in 1785, which established precedents that shaped the development of educational organizations in all states formed after 1785 (the reservation in every township of lot Number 16 for the maintenance of public schools);
- the character of public education as a legal function of the various states as constitutionally established by the delegated powers of the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution;
- the trend, at the state level, to make general reference to educational responsibility in the state constitutions and give the legislature wide powers to establish an adequate and uniform system of education (with the organizational and regulatory aspects of education becoming more or less a legislative responsibility; e.g., 17 of the 23 states in existence in 1820 had enacted some type of statutory provisions for education and 13 had constitutional provisions); and
- the influence of both state courts and the U.S. Supreme Court, through a long list of precedent cases, in shaping the educational pattern of public education and historically reinforcing the principle of the state's responsibility and control of public education.

(See Thurston & Roe, 1957, pp. 51-72, for more details)

The benchmark, precedent-setting earlier cases referred to by Thurston and Roe and other students of education law as instrumental in establishing the principle of the state's responsibility and control of public education is very long and includes: the authority of the legislature to create a system of common schools (*Commonwealth v. Hartman,* 1851); its authority to broaden the scope of education to include high schools *(Stuart v. School District No. 1 of the Village of Kalamazoo,* 1874); authority to require local districts to incur debt for the construction of public schools (*Revell v. City of Annapolis,* 1895); authority to control the curriculum (*Meyer v. State of Nebraska,* 1922); the legislative right to establish compulsory attendance laws, but under limited conditions (*Pierce v. Society of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary,* 1925); and the authority of the legislature to use public funds in support of private schools (*Cochran et al. v. Louisiana State Board of Education* et al., 1930). The legislature's authority to create, alter, or dissolve school districts, a subject of special interest to this discussion, is also well established and is briefly outlined below.

States' Plenary Authority Over District Organization.

A series of court cases in the first half of this century established a number of legal principles regarding the state's plenary authority to create, alter, or dissolve school districts. These principles have gone largely unchallenged to the present time. There appears to be a substantial consensus among students of education law (Alexander & Alexander, 1985; Edwards, 1971; Hamilton & Mort, 1941; Remmlein, 1953; Reutter & Hamilton, 1976; Stephens, 1990) that the following legal principles are well established:

- Local school districts are governmental agencies of the state created as instrumentalities through which the state carries out the constitutional mandate to provide a system of common or public schools.
- It follows that the power of the state, over its educational system, is plenary, subject only to such limitations as may be imposed by the state or federal constitutions.
- It follows that the state may alter or dissolve that which it has plenary authority to create.
- It is almost universally held that the legislature may delegate the formation and alteration of school districts to subordinate agencies or officials and that this delegation of administrative control does not violate the principle of the separation of power.
- The major constitutional constraints on the plenary authority of the state to delegate to a subordinate agency or official are (1) possible

violations of or the impairment of the obligation of contracts (Section 10, Article 1, U.S. Constitution) and (2) concerns that the exercise of authority may be arbitrary or unreasonable (Thirteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution).

- Since the state has plenary authority over the public schools, all local school officials represent the state and serve as officials or agents of the state.
- All local school district property is state property held in trust for the state by local officials.

The legal issues surrounding the state's plenary authority over district reorganization, which at one time generated substantial litigation, appear to have been settled by the end of the 1950s. It has reemerged in recent years, but the majority of the newer challenges center on the state's authority with regard to the merger of urban and suburban districts for the purpose of achieving court-ordered desegregation or as a response to judicial remedies for affecting fiscal equity among districts, usually in a metropolitan region.

The possible significance of these newer challenges for rural districts is not known, even though the well-established legal principles cited above emerged in eras when rural districts were the focus of attention. While the plenary authority over the alteration or dissolution of districts has been a settled matter for some time, differences in the manner in which states have exercised their authority are, of course, to be noted. These have changed over time, as the subsequent review will show.

The New Definitions of the State's Responsibility.

It seems clear that a number of recent state supreme court decisions are resulting in new, much broader legal definitions of the state's constitutional responsibility for education. A number of recent cases are cited in support of the assertion that a fundamental redefinition is occurring. Most of these cases have centered on challenges over the alleged inequality of existing state school finance plans.

Challenges to the equity of state school finance plans greatly accelerated between 1971 and 1987, a period when some 28 states enacted major reform measures in their finance plans. This relatively extensive activity was the result of a number of state supreme court decisions that declared the existing formulas in several states to be unconstitutional during this time, including the following: *Serrano v. Priest* in California (1971), *Robinson v. Cahill* in New Jersey (1973), *Horton v. Meskill* in Connecticut (1977), and *Dupree v. Alma School District* in Arkansas (1983).

These new challenges are increasingly based on two fundamental positions that together form a powerful pressure for an expanded state role in education. The first—and more traditional one—argues from the position of the state's constitutional requirement mandating the provision of education. Common language used in these rulings directs the state to "establish" or "maintain" a "uniform," "common," "general," and "thorough and efficient" system of schools (Wise, 1972). The second—and newer position—argues that a state aid formula must also satisfy the principles embedded in the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Alexander and Alexander (1985) stress the significance of this new positions:

> Recent court actions challenging the constitutionality of state school aid formulas under specific state constitutional provisions and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment represent an evolutionary step in judicial expansion of constitutional protections of individual rights. Constitutional rights of students have been extended, placing new limitations and restrictions on the police power of the state to regulate and control education. Courts once obliquely maintained that education was a privilege bestowed upon the individual by the good will of the state and that it could be altered or even taken away at state discretion. Today, however, this attitude has been changed and now the concept is that the student possesses a constitutional interest in an education. Under Due Process, the litigation continues to test various provisions of state constitutions and their attendant ramifications. The theory that education is a protected interest has manifested itself in constitutional protections for students in both the substantive and procedural aspects of constitutional law.
>
> (Alexander & Alexander, 1985, p. 709)

Recently, the Kentucky Supreme Court (*Rose v. The Council for Better Education, Inc.*, 1989), in upholding a lower court that declared the entire state system of education unconstitutional, has perhaps provided the ultimate redirection to date of the state's responsibility for education. The judge in the lower court case (*Council for Better Schools, Inc. v. Wilkinson*, 1988) defined the essential, and minimal, characteristics of the constitutional requirement for an efficient system of common schools.

(1) Its establishment, maintenance, and funding are the sole responsibility of the General Assembly.

(2) It is free to all.

(3) It is available to all Kentucky children.

(4) It is substantially uniform throughout the state.

(5) It provides equal educational opportunities to all Kentucky children.

(6) It is monitored by the General Assembly to assure that there is no waste, no duplication, no mismanagement, and no political influence.

(7) Schools are operated under the premise that an adequate education is a constitutional right.

(8) Sufficient funding provides each child an adequate education

(Legislative Research Commission, 1990, p. 2).

The court also took the unusual step of defining what an "adequate education" should include:

- communication skills necessary to function in a complex and changing civilization;
- knowledge to make economic, social, and political choices;
- understanding of governmental processes as they affect the community, state, and nation;
- sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of one's mental and physical wellness;
- sufficient grounding in the arts to enable each student to appreciate his or her cultural and historical heritage;
- sufficient preparation to choose and pursue one's life's work intelligently; and
- skills enabling students to compete favorably with students in other states.

(*Council for Better Schools v. Wilkinson*, 1988, p. 28)

In upholding the lower court ruling, the State Supreme Court stated the responsibility of the legislature in clear language:

> This decision applies to the entire sweep of the system—all its parts and parcels. This decision applies to the statutes creating, implementing, and financing the *system* and to all regulations, etc., pertaining thereto. This decision covers the creation of local school districts, school boards, and the Kentucky Department of Education and to the Minimum Foundation Program and Power Equalization Program. It covers school construction and maintenance, teacher certification—the whole gamut of the common school system in Kentucky....Since we have, by this decision, declared the system of common schools in Kentucky to be unconstitutional, Section 183 places an absolute duty on the General Assembly to re-create, re-establish a new system of common schools in the Commonwealth.... The General Assembly has the obligation to see that all [taxable] property is assessed at 100 percent of its fair market value.... We view this decision as an opportunity for the General Assembly to launch the Commonwealth into a new era of educational opportunity which will ensure a strong economic, cultural and political future.
>
> (*Council for Better Schools v. Wilkinson*, 1988, pp. 3-4)

In still another far-reaching case last year, the U.S. Supreme Court (*Missouri v. Jenkins*, 1990) gave the unprecedented power to federal judges to order local officials to increase property taxes to finance school desegregation in Kansas City. The principle established here is that the federal courts can judicially order financial remedies where local and state governments fail to fulfill their constitutional requirements.

At the present time, it is estimated that legal challenges to existing state aid formulas are pending in at least 10 states. It seems clear that the courts are being increasingly assertive in broadening the defini-

tion of the state's constitutional responsibility to establish a common system of schools. It also seems clear that such actions will require states to eliminate geography and wealth as determinants of equality of educational opportunity.

Lack of Support for Mandated District Reorganization

The overview on this topic, the fourth of the pressures on the state to address the problems confronting rural schools, is more complete than the preceding three. Considered are a number of historical practices that help explain the background of the currently continuing, highly charged controversy over the use of mandated district reorganization as the state's policy response to the rural school problem.

Variations in How States Organized Local Schools

Great diversity in how states have organized their local school district structure has existed for some time. While over the years other factors (e.g., size of enrollment) have been in use, the major variations of types of local school systems appear to center on three principal features:

- the geographic area of the districts, especially with regard to their proximity to the boundaries of other local governmental jurisdictions;
- the scope of the educational program offered; and
- the operational relationships of the districts to other local governments.

These three distinguishing characteristics can be used to classify districts into seven basic types, which have been or presently are in use in the nation. The first four of these stress the geographic area served by the district. The next two reflect scope of educational program. The final type defines the operational relationship of the district to other local governments. These seven types are:

- county school district,
- township or town school district,
- common school district,
- a single state school system,
- elementary or high school district,
- fiscally independent or dependent school district, and
- nonoperating school district (see subsequent discussion).

Dominant Patterns to be Found in the States

Complicating the task of establishing the dominant patterns to be found in the states is the fact that some states have made simultaneous use of one or more of the seven basic types at different points in their history. Others opted for a particular type earlier in their history, only to change subsequently—in some cases several times. Nonetheless, an attempt is made here to summarize the extent of use of each type in each of three different time periods that span the past seven decades (see Table 3).

County districts. By 1956, halfway through the era of the "Big Push" to reorganize school districts, 12 states had either (1) mandated that their local school systems be coterminous with the political boundaries of the county unit of local government or (2) established partial county units. Maryland was the first state to do so, when in 1868 it created 23 districts, one for each of its county governments, plus a special charter system for the City of Baltimore (Moyer & Zimmerman, 1969). Other county-unit states are located principally in the southeastern region of the nation. These states (together with the date county units were established) include: Alabama (1903), Tennessee (1907), Kentucky (1908), Louisiana (parishes rather than counties, 1912), Virginia (1923), and West Virginia (1933)—which completed their reorganizations early in the century— followed by Georgia (1945) and Nevada (1956). A number of the southeastern states also exempt large city systems from the county school district, creating instead special charter districts having coterminous boundaries with those of the city (Cook, 1937).

Town or township districts. The town or township served as the geographic region for local districts in the six New England states prior to the turn

Table 3
Basic Types of Public Local School Districts

Type	The Early Years 1920-1945	The Era of the "Big Push" 1946-1965	The Last Two Decades 1966-
1. County School District	eight states (predominantly southern region of country); large city system exempt in some states	four additional states (three southern plus Nevada)	no change
2. Township or Town School District	nine states by end of period (including all six New England states)	no change	no change
3. Common School District	thirty-one states (predominantly midwestern and western regions of county; some former states having township or town school districts	twenty-eight states (minus four that moved to county districts; plus the new state of Alaska)	no change
4. State School District		one state (the new state of Hawaii)	no change
5. Elementary or High School District	in many states having townships or town or common school districts	generally limited to the two states of California and Illinois	no change
6. Fiscally Dependent School Districts	in many states having county school districts	no major change	no major change
7. Nonoperating School	in many states having township or town or common school districts	in general phased out and assigned to an operating district	continued phasing out

of the century. By the end of World War II, three additional states (Indiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania) followed this practice. A number of other states, particularly in the Midwest, made initial use of this arrangement, but replaced it subsequently, in part or in whole, with the common school district form, discussed next (Covert, 1930).

Common school district. By far the most predominant organizational pattern followed by the states for much of this century is the common school district. This form is a geographical organization based on a unit other than township, town, or county. This practice has been most prevalent since approximately 1920 in many states, the majority of them located in the midwestern and western region of the country: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. With the granting of statehood, Alaska chose the same pattern (DeYoung, 1942). Many of these states had already gone through one or more school district reorganization efforts earlier in the century. According to Cubberley (1934), 20 states had enacted district reorganization legislation between 1897 and 1905 alone.

Single state district. Hawaii is the only state that selected to create a single school district to serve its entire jurisdiction, although the U.S. Office of Education continued to refer to Delaware as a single state school system as late as the early 1930s (Deffenbaugh & Covert, 1933).

Elementary and high school districts. A number of states allowed separate elementary and separate high school districts well into the century when the unified district plan became the most dominant pattern across the country. Two states in particular, California and Illinois, have retained these options to the present day.

Fiscal status. Degree of fiscal dependence (or independence) is yet another type of district relevant to the discussion.[2] A number of states have and continue to grant their local districts considerable fiscal autonomy from other local governments, lodging fiscal responsibility for the affairs of the district in a board of education, usually an elected board. Others, especially those states where district boundaries were coterminous with county governments, generally created fiscally dependent systems, usually governed by an appointed board.

Nonoperating districts. Of final interest here, a number of states still continue the practice of allowing the voters of a region to maintain a district even though it no longer operates a program of any kind, instead tuitioning their students to a neighboring district. Nonoperating systems were fairly prevalent in earlier times. There were still 349 nonoperating systems in the country as late as 1983-84 (U.S. Department of Education, 1987).

Origins of the State Variations

As noted previously, the design used by a state to establish its local school districts is influenced by the political traditions of the state. This observation applies, in particular, as these traditions relate to the structure of *all local governments*, of which school district governments are but one. The structure of local government in the United States has its roots in the colonial period and was patterned in many ways after the system of local government used in England.

According to political scientist Paul Wager (1950), four major systems of local government developed in colonial America:

- the New England plan, where the town was the principal local government unit;
- the Virginia plan, where the county was the major unit and where the town or townships were seldom used;
- the New York plan, where both the county and town were both used; and
- the Pennsylvania plan, where both the county and township were established, with the latter subordinate to the former.

(see Wager, 1950, pp. 7-8)

The tradition of extensive support for local government structures to be found in colonial times greatly influenced the patterns in other regions of the

country as the nation developed. The Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (1982), after commenting on the great variations to be found in the structure of local government in the country, provides a useful overview of the popular view of this process:[3]

> According to a succession of scholars over the past 90 years, the subsequent settlement of the rest of the nation (or at least the contiguous 48 states) was characterized by the transplanting of the East Coast's tripartite system in a manner that generally followed the path of westward-moving settlers. This produced a regional pattern again based mainly on the relative importance of the township and the county, although some observers also have seen evidence of patterned distribution of municipalities and special districts. Under this interpretation, the 48 contiguous states fall into four or five regions: (1) New England, with the town preeminent; (2) the south, the southwest and the far west, all using primarily the familiar county system initiated in the south and carried from there by westward-moving southerners; and (3) and (4), two parts of what is generally known as the midwestern or midcentral states, divided by the relative influence of the New York or Pennsylvania type of mixed county-township system.
>
> —(Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1982, p. 258)

Significance of Early State Patterns and Traditions

The preceding overview of dominant patterns of school district organization in place by the early part of this century—together with the related political traditions in the various states—provides background for the discussion of the reorganization movement, which follows. The practices used shaped much of the controversy and the direction of the reorganization movement that was launched in earnest in the ensuing decades.

For example, the variety of organizational arrangements that were in use, each based in part on the political traditions of the various states, required a reorganization strategy that was consistent with those traditions. This variety precluded—or at least reduced—the adoption of a uniform national strategy, despite apparent efforts leading in this direction.[4]

Another consequence of the practices in place across the country is that the arrangements used produced a large number of school districts, particularly in those states making use of either the township (or town) or common school plans. In such places, attempts were made to establish schools in close geographic proximity to students.

Moreover, it is important to note, relatively large sectors of the nation's population have been spared the dislocations of reorganization, dislocations that have occupied center stage in the policy communities in many states for much of the century. For example, residents of those states that chose early to structure their local school districts around county civil divisions have generally escaped the controversy of district reorganization. Additionally, residents of large city school systems, where the reorganization of numerous smaller ward-size districts into citywide systems was generally accomplished early in the history of public education, were similarly fortunate.

School districts organized on a county or city geographic basis have usually been less vulnerable to charges of having too few students to offer a comprehensive program, a popular line of argument for reorganization throughout the century. They enjoyed still another benefit. Since reorganization often entails the participation of another unit of local government, county or city units established early in the century often avoided this additional entanglement, at least in the present century.

The final point to be stressed here is perhaps the most important. The practices used in early times tended to reflect a *strong commitment* to the concept of local control of education. It is true, of course, that a desire for local control was prominent in the decision to create a local school district structure that was highly decentralized and close to the people in the first instance. However, it follows that even greater allegiance to the concept was forthcoming once communities had experience with it.

In summary, one conclusion stands out. It has essentially been the rural and small town population of the nation that has been most affected by the school district reorganization movement, frequently experiencing several waves of reorganization.

The Success of Earlier Rural District Reorganization

Policies aimed at the reorganization of school districts through the combination of two or more districts, usually districts of small enrollment, into a larger administrative unit have been in place in many states for much of the century. There can be little doubt that these policies have been effective.

Reduction in the number of school districts. Sher and Tompkins, whose work on behalf of rural education in the 1970s is justifiably credited by many as instrumental in reawakening the nation to its neglect of education in a rural setting, offer the observation that "the most successfully implemented educational policy of the past fifty years has been the consolidation of rural schools and school districts" (Sher & Tompkins, 1976, p. 1). James Guthrie, an education policy analyst at Stanford University, echoed the same theme when he commented that the school reorganization movement "reflects one of the most awesome and least publicized governmental changes in the nation during the 20th century" (Guthrie, 1980, p. 120).

It would be difficult to argue against these claims. As shown in Figure 1, the number of public school districts stood at 127,531 in 1931-32, the first year that reliable national data are reported. Over the ensuing years, their number was, by 1987-88, reduced to 15,577. This represents a reduction of approximately 113,000 units, a decrease of 88 percent. It is true, of course, that much of the reduction was due to the decline in the number of one-teacher rural school districts early in this period. The virtual elimination of nonoperating districts across the country also accounts for a portion of the reduction. Nonetheless, it is to be noted that the dramatic *reduction* of the number of public school districts occurred simultaneously with substantial *increases* in the total public elementary-secondary school enrollment. Despite modest decreases in recent years, school enrollment grew significantly during the last half-century.

Growth in other forms of local government. Moreover, the huge reduction in the number of school districts is especially noteworthy because it is without precedent among other forms of local government. Changes of the magnitude experienced in the school government sector have clearly not occurred in any other category of local government.

The U.S. Census Bureau began reporting on the number of types of local governmental units in 1942 and has continued to do so at five-year intervals, except for the immediate post-World War II year of 1947. Difficulties in enumerating special districts and school districts, two of the five major forms of local governmental subdivisions, prior to 1942 prevented the Bureau from beginning its tabulations earlier.

While there has been a decrease in the total number of local governments in the nation in the 45 years since a standardized enumeration system has been in use (from 155,067 in 1942 to 83,166 in 1987, as shown in Table 4), the reduction of local school districts accounts for the vast majority of this decrease. Little change has occurred with regard to the number of county governments. The number of municipalities has shown a moderate increase, about equal to the modest decrease in number of townships. Special districts, particularly the single-function variety (e.g., natural resources, fire protection, housing and community development, sewerage, parks and recreation, hospitals, libraries), have increased over 250 percent.

Strategies Used

A number of strategies were employed by the states in earlier times to effect the massive school district reorganizations—usually in rural areas—cited previously. Although frequently used in combination, four basic approaches are discernible. In an earlier paper that focused exclusively on reorganization strategies (Stephens, 1986), I identified the four as:

- the enactment of legislation promoting reorganization (three major variants: mandatory legislation, permissive legislation, semipermissive legislation);
- enactment of state aid formulas containing fiscal incentives or disincentives;
- the enactment of new or strengthened standards for the operation of districts (especially those concerned with the scope of the program,

Figure 1
Decline in the Number of Basic Administrative Units
1931-32 to Fall 1987

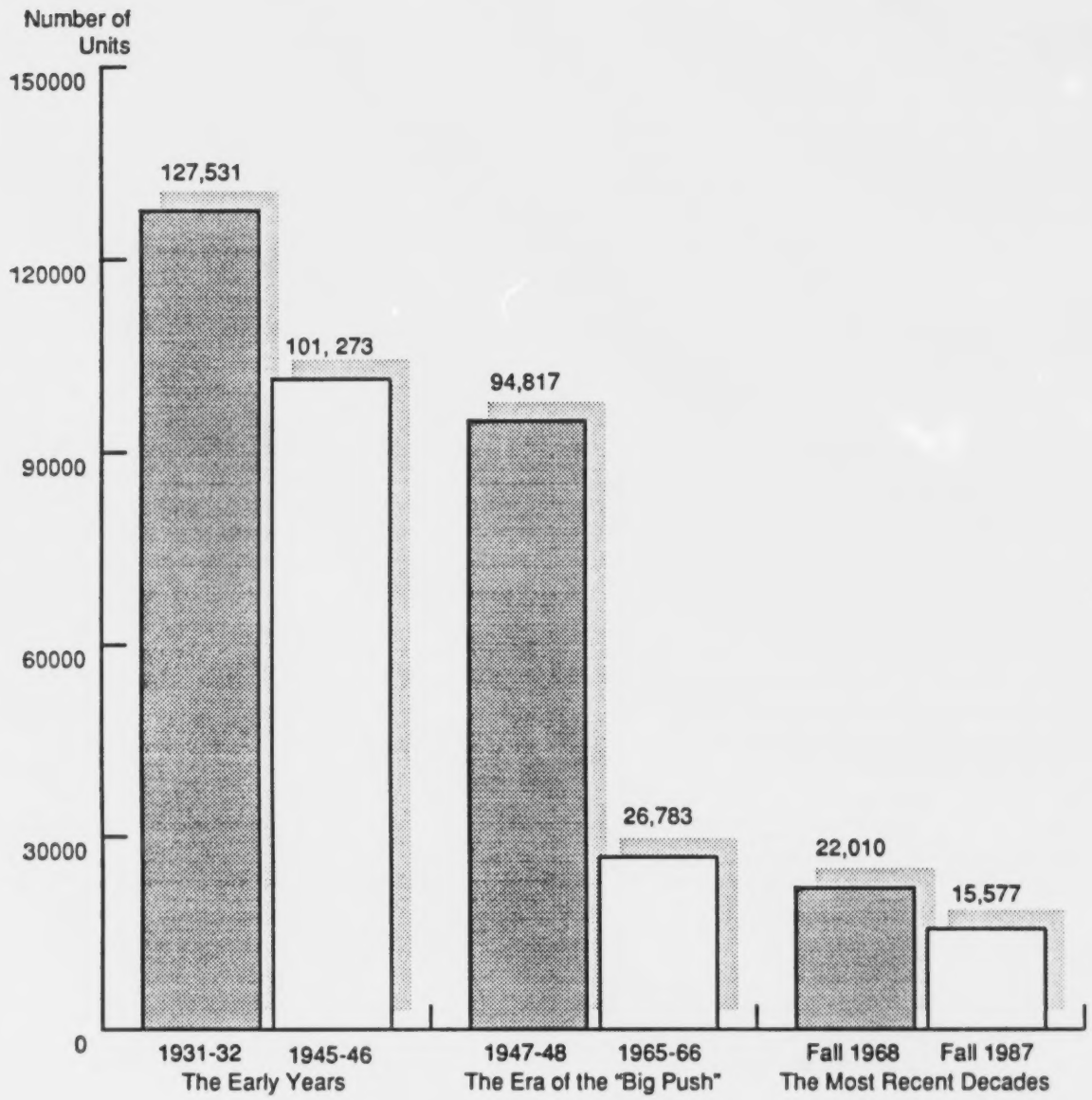

Table 4
Changes in the Number of Governmental Units, 1942-1987

Type of Unit	1942	1952	1957	1967	1977	1987	Change, 1942-1987 Number	Percent
U.S. Government	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	
State Governments	48	50[a]	50[a]	50	50	50	+2	+4.0
Local Governments	155,067	116,756	102,341	81,248	79,862	83,166	-71,901	-46.4
County	3,050	3,052	3,050	3,049	3,042	3,042	-8	[c]
Municipality	16,220	16,807	17,215	18,048	18,862	19,205	+2,985	+18.4
Township	18,919	17,202	17,198	17,105	16,822	16,691	-2,228	-11.7
School District[b]	108,579	67,355	50,454	21,782	15,174	14,741	-93,838	-86.4
Special District	8,299	12,340	14,424	21,264	25,962	29,487	+21,188	+255.3
Total	155,116	116,807	102,392	81,299	79,913	83,217	-71,899	-46.4

Notes:

(a) The Bureau of the Census adjusted the 1952 and 1957 data to include units in Alaska and Hawaii prior to their statehood in 1959.

(b) The Bureau of the Census does not include "dependent" public school systems in its count of the number of school districts; the 1,500 "dependent" units in 1987 are classified as agencies of other governments, not as separate units.

(c) Less than .01 percent.

Source:

Compiled from data reported in the *Census of Governments* for the years 1942, 1952, 1957, 1967, 1977 (Preliminary Report issued November, 1977). Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce.

personnel, facilities, and the financial aspects of district operation); and

- the use of extra-legal measures to promote attainment of the same policy goal (especially the advocacy of reorganization by the professional communities, by many in academe, and by state officials).

The first three strategies in particular were given prominence in the work of Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, and Usdan (1975); Fitzwater (1958); and Knezevich (1984). Fitzwater's early descriptive report, which covered 16 states actively engaged in district reorganization efforts, stands as the seminal descriptive study on this topic.

In the previously cited work (Stephens, 1986), I further argued that the fourth strategy, an early version of the use of the bully-pulpit (seldom considered elsewhere in the literature), was perhaps the most influential and effective of all, because it more than likely precipitated the other three.

Lack of Appeal in Contemporary Times

Although states realized great success in the middle decades of this century in achieving the almost universal goal of reducing the number of operating rural, small school systems, great numbers of these units are still in existence, as noted previously. Their continued existence is due, in part, to the reorganization's current lack of political feasibility.

For example, the three most recent statewide initiatives to mandate the reorganization of rural schools—those in Illinois, Nebraska, and North Carolina in the late 1980s—aroused so much opposition that legislative support was withdrawn or the proposals were greatly modified.[5] Apparently most state legislative bodies have adopted a strategy attributed to the late United States Senator George Aiken for ending the Vietnam War, "declare victory and get out."

However, the lack of appeal of the strategy is also grounded in more substantive reasons. In a recent chapter (Stephens, 1990), I attempted to explain its virtual withdrawal as a major policy response as attributable to four factors:

- The claim that larger systems are more efficient economically is not supported by recent research; it is, at best, mixed (Educational Research Service, 1971; Fox, 1981; Howley, 1989; Sher and Tompkins, 1976; Walberg and Fowler, 1987).
- The second major line of argument put forth by reorganization advocates, the claim of superior quality of programs of larger systems, is also questionable on the basis of mixed evidence (Gump, 1979; Monk and Haller, 1986; Nachtigal, 1982; Peshkin, 1978; and Tyack, 1974).
- The emergence of strong rural school interest groups in many states, which made mandated reorganization—often a highly emotional issue among local citizens—less feasible politically.
- The discovery of other viable program delivery options that held promise of alleviating a number of issues facing rural schools, most of these calling for some type of interdistrict coordination (Stephens, 1990, p. 13).

Greater Acceptance of the Public Choice Theory

Another new pressure on the states, one that is closely related to the preceding one, is the growing acceptance of public choice theory. One of the groups arguing for the concept is the influential Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR), a congressionally chartered organization. In a recent publication (*The Organization of Local Public Economics*, 1987), the ACIR, long an advocate on the reorganization of local governments, advanced the position that it is important to distinguish the provision and production of public goods and services:

> A local public economy can be viewed as having a provision side and a production side, each of which can be organized in different ways. The criteria for organizing provision differ substantially from the criteria for organizing production. Provision criteria are concerned with how best to satisfy the preferences of citizens; production criteria have to do with the efficient management of

> human and material resources. In particular, the appropriate scale of organization for provision is frequently quite different from the appropriate scale for production.
> (ACIR, 1987, p. 1)

The ACIR's historical position concerning the fragmentation of local government would seem to be reversed by the following statement:

> A multiplicity of general-purpose and special-purpose governments in a metropolitan area is not an obstacle to good government or to metropolitan governance. On the contrary, a diversity of local governments can promote key values of democratic government—namely, efficiency, equity, responsiveness, accountability, and self-governance. A multiplicity of differentiated governments does not necessarily imply fragmentation; instead, such governments can constitute a coherent local public economy.
> (ACIR, 1987, p. 1)

The new position of ACIR represents a major paradigm shift in public administration. It seems consistent with a number of Naisbitt's (1982) highly acclaimed trends (e.g., centralization-decentralization; representative democracy-participatory democracy; either/or-multiple option).

Distinguishing provision from production allows one to minimize the previous position of many that holds that, in the case of education, each local school district in a state must not only provide all state-required or needed services, but, in addition, produce all those services, a formidable task indeed given the current widespread discrepancies in the wealth and other resources of local school systems.

The Need for a Recommitment to the Concept of "All One System"

Credit for reintroducing the powerful concept of "all one system" clearly belongs to Hodgkinson (1985), who six years ago produced a report on the highly significant, and at that time, virtually unnoticed changing demographics of education in this nation. Hodgkinson introduces his report with these insightful reminders:

> Almost everyone who works in education perceives it as a set of discrete institutions working in isolation from each other. These institutions restrict the age range of their students: nursery schools, day care centers, Kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools, two year colleges, four year undergraduate colleges, universities with graduate programs, and post-graduate institutions.
>
> People working in each of the above institutions have virtually no connection with all the others and little awareness of educational activity provided by the total. Because of this, the school is defined as the unit, not THE PEOPLE WHO MOVE THROUGH IT. The only people who see these institutions as a system are the students—because some of them see it all.... It is our conviction that we need to begin seeing the educational system from the perspective of the people who move through it. This is because changes in the composition of the group moving through the educational system will change the system faster than anything else except nuclear war.
> (Hodgkinson, 1985, p. 1)

Hodgkinson also makes a key related assertion, as follows:

> It is assumed that if people can begin to SEE the educational system as a single entity through which people move, they may begin to behave as if all of education were related. It seems self-evident that such a perception is good.
> (Hodgkinson, 1985, p. 1)

Hodgkinson correctly concentrated his initial attention to the need for the education community to imagine itself as "all one system." However, his admonition applies *equally well* to other public services, to the relationship between education and those other public services; and, germane to our interest here, the relationship between governmental jurisdic-

tions at the state and local levels, as well.

The need for closer cooperation and coordination between local school district governments and local general governments has been argued by many obervers for a long period of time. For example, over a quarter of a century ago, the American Association of School Administrators and the International City Managers' Association sponsored a series of three regional meetings for the specific purpose of improving relations between these two principal local governmental jurisdictions.

In a keynote address for the first meeting, Bailey (1964), a political scientist, expressed the concerns of many advocates of greater coordination when he asserted that there are five great needs of local government. These, he believed, could be successfully met only if these two important local jurisdictions were to lay aside their traditional autonomy and frequently acrimonious relationships and work in greater harmony. Bailey's five basic priority local government needs are:

- the greatest substantive need, for coordinated planning—by the school district and local government—that is sound and consistent;
- the need for compensatory budgeting, whereby the allocation of all local fiscal resources is done in such a way that resources are expended on the basis of need;
- the need for greater horizontal communication, whereby the two jurisdictions develop more coordinated operations;
- the need for vertical cooperation, whereby all levels of government—local, county, state, and federal—who by design or default are all engaged in the most important public functions, would achieve greater cooperation in the delivery of public services; and, finally,
- the need for redirected and reeducated leadership in both general and school government, which Bailey regarded as the procedural prerequisite to meeting all of the preceding four needs.

(Bailey, 1964, pp. 7-11)

Bailey's comments were appropriately directed toward all local governments, urban and rural alike. Further, his call was for greater cooperation and coordination, not the complete integration of the two jurisdictions, which had been a common position of many political scientists and educators a quarter of a century ago:

> This does not necessarily imply that general government must absorb all school governments or usurp all fiscal sources now available to school districts. It does mean that extraordinary efforts must be undertaken to relate the interests and activities of school governments to those of general government—and in some areas to effect new instruments of coordination.
>
> (Bailey, 1964, p. 7)

Most of the earlier advocates of better relations between school districts and general government tended to argue that such arrangements would result in greater fiscal accountability, revenue enhancement, expenditure reduction, and improvements in horizontal and vertical planning and communication (Graves, 1964; Henry & Kerwin, 1938; Stephens, 1966). One or more of these policy objectives are reflected in most past studies of relationships among school districts and general government (Stephens, 1966), as well as in the tests of potential areas of cooperation argued for by some (Wagner, 1964).

The direction of the debate concerning the relations between school districts and other local governments, however, has changed in recent years. Cunningham (1989), for example, in arguing for the reconstituting (as distinguished from "reorganization") of local government, proposes that the focus of all local governments ought to be "fixed on well-being, acknowledging that education is increasingly fundamental to the well-being and quality of life for Americans of all ages" (Cunningham, 1989, p. 1).

Cunningham argues further that

> Local school districts, local school boards, and local school superintendents be phased out and new local jurisdictions and authorities be defined and approved in their place, such changes to occur over a protracted period, as much as thirty to forty years. Similar transformations in other local governments may occur as well.

> A reconstituted local government for well-being would be responsible for governing such areas as mental health, physical health, public safety, pre-school and nursery school education, adult education, libraries, museums, child day care, adult day care, K-12 schooling, job retraining, employment counseling and placement, provisions for the homeless, literacy, and deinstitutionalization. Today these public services are the responsibility of a melange of agencies and jurisdictions without any policy coordination or focus or continuity of service for individuals over time.
>
> (Cunningham, 1989, pp. 1-2)

In a 1988 monograph (Stephens, 1988a), I reviewed a number of long-term problems of rural local governments in providing basic public services. Together with that review, the observations reported in this section of the chapter suggest to me that it is time to revisit the issue of the continued separation of school district governments and at least some of the human resources functions expected of rural local governments.

The population trends and financial stress being experienced by many of the approximately 50,000 rural governments in nonmetropolitan regions is well documented (Brown & Deavers, 1987; Rainey & Rainey, 1978; Reeder, 1985; Reeder, 1988). These trends will clearly complicate the ability of many rural governments to support basic community services generally associated with considerations about "quality of life."

As important as these considerations are, however, there is perhaps an even more compelling reason to rethink how educational services can be successfully provided in rural communities. This relatively new imperative relates to the changing demographics (Hodgkinson's initial theme) and behavioral patterns of the elementary-secondary population attending rural schools. In the previously cited review (Stephens, 1988b), I asserted that

> The ability of the schools, when acting alone, to respond to the changing conditions over which they have little or no control is greatly limited. A much broader policy response that would consider all of the conditions of children and youth, as well as the relationship these conditions have on schooling, is required. Moreover, if more effective state and local policies and service delivery systems are to be realized, new relationships must be forthcoming between the schools and other instrumentalities of government, as well as with agencies in the private sector.
>
> (Stephens, 1988b, p. 75)

This same theme is expressed by Hodgkinson (1989) in his more recent work examining the interface between education and other service delivery systems. He notes, "It is painfully clear that a hungry child is by definition a poor learner, yet schools have no linkage to health or housing organizations outside those run by the schools themselves" (Hodgkinson, 1989, p. 1).

Notes

1. The Center for Policy Research in Education, a consortium of four universities centered Rutgers University, has, among other valuable services, systematically attempted to track and analyze the reform initiatives undertaken by the several states. For a recent overview of general patterns of state actions, see *State Education Reform in the 1980s* (1989).

2. Some observers argue degree of fiscal dependence (or independence) is not a meaningful variable on which to classify types of district (James, James, & Dyck, 1963). It is, however, retained here because of its relevance to the history of school district reorganization, particularly during the turbulent period following World War II.

3. There is an interesting literature on the variations of local governments in the United States and on efforts to develop local government typologies; see especially Stephens and Olson (1979), and the work of Zimmerman (1981) that explored variations in the degree of discretionary authority granted local general purpose governments.

4. A need exists for a good analysis of the role played by the national professional associations in the promotion of the nearly unchallenged view, which predominated from the late 1940s and into 1960s, of the need for the massive reorganization of rural local school districts. One is especially struck by the uniformity of the positions taken by the American Association of School Administrators and the Department of Rural Education, both units of the National Education Association during this period. Both groups tended to support a uniform set of criteria of an effective school, which often included a largely arbitrary minimum enrollment size. The source of the enrollment criterion and other criteria (uniformly) advanced needs to be better understood. The need for exploring the larger, related questions also exists. For example, how were the professional associations, or influential members of them, able to so effectively shape both professional and public perception of the condition of rural education?

5. An effort to increase the size of schools—not to reorganize districts—is currently underway in West Virginia.

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CHAPTER THREE:
What Ought to be the Focus of "New" State Priorities?

THE NEW PRESSURES affecting rural, small school districts present a major challenge to state planners and decisionmakers. The key to meeting this challenge is deciding which of the numerous and complex issues confronting rural education should be given priority. This chapter synthesizes nine *strategic needs* to help focus the thinking of decisionmakers as they frame relevant state policies. Again, while it would be possible to list many other needs, these nine are regarded to be strategically important, and, thus, generally applicable in all of the states. They consist of the need to:

- view the rural school district as an organization—that is, as a system having a number of interrelated parts, basic organizational needs, and the need for system development;
- address the demonstrable diversity among rural school districts;
- address the traditional problems facing rural schools;
- concentrate on characteristics of effective schools;
- stress the newly formulated national goals of education;
- concentrate on the requirements of the information age society;
- emphasize student performance accountability;
- make the rural school the community learning center; and
- redefine the state-local partnership concept.

In the discussion that follows, a brief rationale for the emphases given these nine priority clusters, along with a discussion of the main features of each, is provided. The list is drawn from a much larger list of needed emphases that would result in improvement in the quality of rural education.[1]

The Need to View the Rural School District as a System

There is a copious literature on organizations and on organizational analysis, much of it arguing for a particular perspective as the most useful way to conceptualize how an organization functions, or to explain how it conducts its work in order to achieve its mission with efficiency and effectiveness (Burns, 1971; Chandler, 1962; March & Simon, 1958; Mintzberg, 1983; Scott, 1981).

One of the conventional perspectives—used here—holds that educational organizations (rural, suburban, and urban alike) have a number of common, near-universal organizational-structural characteristics, and that further, they make use of a number of common processes through which decisionmaking in the organization is conducted. The organizational-structural characteristics of the school district in this conceptualization are nine in number, as shown in Figure 2. The process characteristics in this conceptualization concern four major types of decisions that organizations make in order to carry out the desired functions in each of the nine organizational-structural characteristics:

(1) **planning decisions**, which are concerned with the establishment of a detailed plan for creating, maintaining, or improving a program or activity;

(2) **organizing decisions**, which are concerned with the assignment of appropriate authority and responsibility;

(3) **directing decisions,** which are concerned with the successful motivation of people in the organization; and

(4) **controlling decisions,** which are concerned with the timely identification and correction of discrepancies between the plan for a program or activity and its actual performance.[2]

This conventional perspective of the common organizational-structural and process characteristics of a school promotes viewing the rural district as a system that is ideally a combination of interrelated and interrelating parts that together constitute a whole for the purpose of achieving its mission.[3] A number of critical principles are derived from this common definition of a system:

- Every system must be directed toward the accomplishment of a common mission.
- Every part of a system must contribute to the accomplishment of the system's mission.
- Every part of a system must relate and interact with the other parts of the system so that no effort is wasted and no vital task is left undone.[4]

In addition to the need to view the rural school district as a system, it is also important that those who seek to improve an organization be mindful that all organizations of any complexity have certain basic organizational needs. If these needs are attended to, the result will likely *enhance* the effectiveness of the organization, or, conversely, if ignored, the result will likely *detract* from the organization's effectiveness. There is, of course, a rich literature on the needs of organizations. My preference is for the statement of basic organizational needs put forth by Selznick (1948) over 40 years ago.

Two features support this preference. First, Selznick's statement is highly compatible with the systems theory of organizational effectiveness, and, for that very reason, it is, second, useful for establishing several of the most important dependent variables in organizational effectiveness studies. These needs are:

(1) security in the organization as a whole in relation to the social forces in the environment,

(2) stability of the lines of authority and communication,

(3) stability of the relationships within the organization,

(4) continuity of policy and of the sources of its determination, and

(5) homogeneity of outlook with respect to the role of the organization.

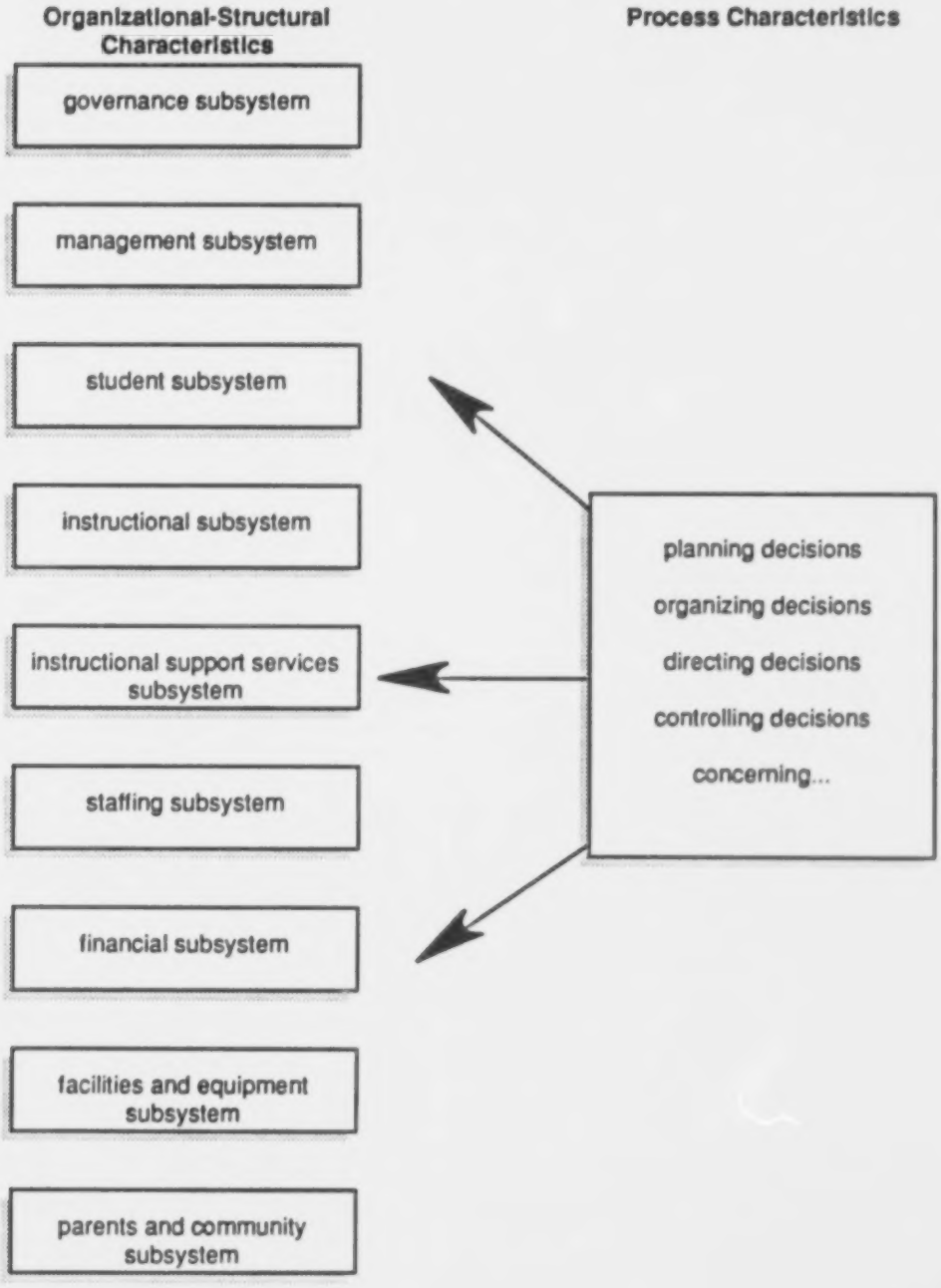
(Selznick, 1948, pp. 26-27)

A final point to be made here is the reminder that rural school districts, like their urban and suburban counterparts, have a tendency to atrophy over a period of time, all else being equal. Acceptance of this tendency, which is well recognized in the literature on organizations, requires that continuous attention be given to the organizational development and renewal of the rural school system.

While there is presently little agreement about what constitutes organizational development (OD), I tend to support the definition offered by Huse and Cummings (1980, p. 2) as "a systemwide application of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development and reinforcement of organizational strategies, structures, and processes for improving an organization's effectiveness." Their definition emphasizes several features that differentiates OD from other organizational change and improvement strategies. The primary intent of OD is the improvement of the effectiveness of the organization, and this point is especially important. As stated by Huse and Cummings:

> This involves two major assumptions. First, an effective organization is able to solve its own problems. OD helps organizational members gain the skills and knowledge necessary to do this problem solving. In this sense, OD differs from other forms of planned change in which external experts either directly solve organizational problems or recommend firm solutions to those problems. Second, an effective organization has both a high quality of work life and high productivity. It is able to attract and motivate effective employees who then perform at high levels. Moreover, the organization's performance is

Figure 2
One View of the Universal Properties of a School District



> responsive to the needs of external groups, such as stockholders, customers, suppliers, and government agencies, that provide the organization with resources and legitimacy.
> (Huse & Cummings, 1980, p. 3)

Owen's (1987) position on the value of the perspective of OD that stresses system renewal, in which he argues against the inevitability of atrophy, is also insightful:

> OD rejects the notion that atrophy is inevitable in organizations. Stated positively, the view is that an organization can develop self-renewing characteristics, enabling it to increase its capability, to adapt to change, and to improve its record of goal achievement.... an energized system marked by increasing vitality and imaginative creativity.
>
> The self-renewal concept is ... one of building into the organizational system the conditions, the skills, the processes, and the culture that foster continual development of the organization over a sustained period of time.
> (Owen, 1987, p. 221)

Acknowledging that the rural school is an organizational system—with certain structures and processes, with evident needs, and, therefore, possessing the possibility of development—opens to view options for improvement that might otherwise be ignored. In particular, such a view can help policymakers see beyond the generality of the "rural school problem," to the reality that, given the support of appropriate policy, rural schools can sustain the kind of efforts and new initiatives that will be expected of them in the coming decades.

The Need to Address the Diversity Among Rural School Districts

Another important consideration in the formulation of a state's policy response is the great diversity that exists among rural schools. This demonstrable diversity must be recognized and addressed better than it has been. Concerns about the tendency to view all rural school systems as alike have been raised by both earlier and latter-day students of rural education (e.g., Butterworth & Dawson, 1952; Sher, 1977), and by several of the national professional associations, especially in earlier times (Commission on Schools in Small Communities, 1939; National Education Association, 1957).

Despite these cautions, however, the prevailing tendency of most is to regard all rural school districts as homogeneous. Nachtigal's (1982) comments in this regard are especially instructive:

> The rich diversity that characterizes rural communities is not so clearly reflected in the rural schools. One hundred years of implementing a common school system policy has resulted in more similarities than differences. The differences, however, are critical, as they have persevered in spite of efforts to provide equal—which has generally been interpreted to mean identical—educational opportunities. The differences have persevered because the linkages between rural schools and communities are still strong enough to offset the pressures of standardization that come from the one best system. Here again the differences are related to economic resources, cultural priorities, commonality of purpose, and political efficacy.
> (Nachtigal, 1982, pp. 275-276)

Nachtigal's work in the development of a typology of rural communities is also drawn upon because of its direct bearing on the issue of rural school improvement efforts. The three classes of rural communities used by Nachtigal are shown in Table 5.

The need to recognize the diversity of rural schools and the importance of the rural school district's contextual environment in school improvement efforts is also given prominence by Carlson (1990) in an insightful paper presented at the Third International Congress for School Effectiveness held in Israel. After reviewing a number of the distinguishing features of the rural context from the perspectives of both the rural community and the rural school district, Carlson offers a number of observations about planning for rural school improvement, which include the following:

> The intertwined relationship of a rural school

Table 5
Nachtigal's Three Categories of Rural Communities

	Values	Socioeconomic Factors	Political Structure/ Locus of Control
1. Rural Poor	Traditional/commonly held	Fairly homogeneous/ low income	Closed, concentrated, often lie outside local community
2. Traditional Middle America	Traditional/commonly held	Fairly homogeneous/ middle income	More open/widely dispersed
3. Communities in Transition	Wide range represented	Wide range/low to high income	Shifting from "old-timers" to "new-comers"

Source: Adapted from Nachtigal, P. M. (1982). Rural America: Multiple realities (Table 16.1, p. 274). In Nachtigal, P. (Ed.), *Rural Education: In Search of a Better Way.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

particularly at the elementary level, and its community necessitates careful and sensitive considerations when planning for effective schools. Some concerns which quickly come to mind are the need to work with low social-economic status families in developing a positive self image and raising aspiration levels, the need to recognize the limited resources to provide special services for children in need and their families, and the lack of resources (e.g., well trained teachers, equipment, space, etc.) with which to enrich the curricula and provide a wider breadth of learning experiences.

However, as is often the case, negatives can also be positive. Because of a shortfall of available resources in rural schools and their communities, the need and motivation to get involved is much greater. Also the typical small size of a rural community makes needs of its residents more apparent and with some encouragement from the school, church, and/or other community organizations will precipitate people's involvement in meeting important needs. The fishbowl nature of rural environments permits greater opportunity to observe the needs of one's neighbors and helps reduce indifference which often characterizes larger population centers. Some vivid descriptions of the influence of the close ties of the school to its community can be found in Peshkin (1978) and Keizer (1988).

Again, the proximity of the rural community to its school offers both promise and caution when it comes to planning for an effective school. The promises are very congruent with contemporary thoughts on educational planning. That is, current theories of educational planning suggest greater sensitivity to the nature of the planning context, including community culture, and an incremental, participatory process. Coupling these phenomena with a more practical, get-by-with-less orientation encourages greater use of human resources and less dependence on technology, which often is not readily available.

(Carlson, 1990, pp. 17-18)

The implications of the work of Nachtigal (1982) and others who have wrestled with the construction of rural school typologies (Gjelten, 1982; National Rural, Small Schools Task Force, 1988), which also focus on community socioeconomic factors, seem clear. Rural school districts are probably as diverse one from another as they are from urban and suburban districts. Uniform state policy strategies that cannot accommodate the diversity present in all states in their design and in their tactical implications are likely to fail to achieve their intended goals.

The Need to Address Traditional Problems

Failure to address problems and issues endemic to small-scale operations, over which many rural districts have little or no control, could impair the achievement of virtually all alternative policies. Moreover, leveling the playing field seems to be the minimal expectation of governmental pursuit of that evasive concept of equality of opportunity, a point that will be stressed in a subsequent chapter.

The nature of these endemic problems and how they interact has been commented on by many. Sher and Rosenfeld's (1977) discussion is a particularly useful recent commentary:

> First, rural schools, unlike small schools elsewhere, must contend with unique problems of sparsity and isolation. This implies more than simply overcoming difficulties caused by geography or distance. It also refers to the fact that rural schools tend to be isolated from the educational, governmental, and economic support system found in metropolitan areas. It also means that sources of assistance to rural schools (from universities, mental health centers, teacher centers, cultural institutions, and other potential allies) are notably absent in most regions.
>
> (Sher & Rosenfeld, 1977, p. 25)

Beckner's (1983) discussion of rural, small schools is one of the most comprehensive and balanced recent essays on the special strengths and problems of these organizations. His observations about the peculiar problems of rural schools, grouped into six categories, include:

- **Community relationships and control:** Smaller communities tend to be more conservative.... If the community is isolated, as well as small, there is likely to be cultural impoverishment and parochialism.
- **Finance:** Some schools are not inherently efficient financially.... To provide a quality program requires a relatively high per-student expenditure.... The tradition of paying for schools with local ad valorem taxes causes a wide variation in the ability of small communities to support their schools.
- **Administration:** Administrators in small schools have little, if any, assistance.... Few specialized services to students and teachers are available.... There is limited opportunity for professional growth.
- **Teachers:** Attracting and keeping quality teachers is one of the greatest difficulties faced by small schools, especially in economically disadvantaged areas.... Professional development is especially difficult.... Many teachers must teach outside their field.... Supportive services are often lacking.
- **Students:** Students have fewer choices of course offerings....fewer provisions for students needing special assistance....fewer support services available (guidance, counseling, health, psychological, instructional).
- **Curriculum and instruction:** Course offerings are limited in scope and depth.... New teaching technologies are seldom available.... Lack of finances often limits the availability of instructional materials.... Special programs for exceptional students are often inadequate or nonexistent.

(Beckner, 1983, pp. 17-20)

Many of these same themes have been expressed by most contemporary observers (Barker, Muse, & Smith, 1985; Jess, 1985; Spillane, 1980). The persistence, deep-seatedness, and pervasiveness of many of these concerns are also given prominence in earlier commentaries on the plight of rural schools as well (Commission on Schools in Small Communities, 1939; an early annual report of the National Education Association, 1950; and an early yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, [Henry, 1952]).

Empirical support for many of Beckner's observations, and those of others, in the three critical problem areas of the curriculum, staffing, and financial aspects of rural, small school district operations is available in a growing body of rich literature. For example, recent work by Barker (1985) and Monk (1987) supports the widely held view that size of enrollment generally affects the depth and breadth of curricular offerings.

However, one of the most definitive studies of the effect of size of enrollment and program comprehensiveness, compiled recently by Haller and colleagues (1989) at Cornell University, provides a number of cautions that should be considered. The Cornell team used a sample of four-year public high schools and data from the files of the *High School and Beyond* surveys collected by the National Center for Education Statistics. They divided their sample into seven enrollment size categories based on the number of graduates in the class of 1979 (less than 25, 25-49, 50-99, 100-199, 200-299, 300-399, and 400 or more) and concentrated their attention on three curricular areas: mathematics, the sciences, and foreign languages. A number of the major findings include:

> We asked first whether the programs of large schools are more comprehensive than those offered by small ones. The answer to this question is clearly yes, at least when comprehensiveness is construed as offering base, advanced, and alternative courses in the three curricular areas we examined. With the single exception of the base course in mathematics, larger schools are more likely to offer base, advanced, and alternative courses in each of the subjects we studied than are small schools.
>
> We also asked whether, at any given size, programs in different curricular areas are equally comprehensive. The answer to this question seems to be no. The cases of mathematics and science are illustrative. Even the very smallest schools are able to offer nearly a full complement of base, advanced and alternative courses in mathematics. (That is, enough courses to fill a student's program for four years.) In contrast, in science barely half of the very small schools are able to offer either base course. Further, small schools

offer fewer advanced courses and still fewer alternatives than they offer in mathematics. These differences between the two subject areas exist at all higher levels of school size.

The pattern in foreign languages departed from that of both mathematics and the sciences. In the smallest schools advanced courses are less common than their equivalents in the other two subjects. Alternative courses are entirely absent. As schools get larger, however, the number of advanced language courses increases rapidly; by the time schools reach 200 graduates per year, advanced language offerings are as common as those in mathematics and more common than those in science. Yet, alternative courses in the languages remain very scarce. Thus, as schools get larger, program comprehensiveness increases differentially across subject areas.

Further, another aspect of differentiated growth is evident when one considers the three types of courses that make up a comprehensive program. Specifically, base and advanced courses seem to take precedence over alternative ones. This tendency was somewhat evident in mathematics, more evident in science, and most extreme in foreign languages, where very few schools offered any alternative courses at all. Recall that one primary function of alternatives is to serve the needs of students who lack the interest or talent required by the base and advanced courses in a subject. Our finding suggests that, as resources become available for use in academic subject areas (perhaps from whatever economies of scale large schools enjoy) those resources tend to be used to serve the curricular needs of academically talented or college-going students, rather than the needs of the less talented or those bound for the workplace.

(Haller, Monk, Spotted Bear, Griffith, & Moss, 1990, pp. 16-17)

It is also true that the practice of many states of adding more secondary school math and science requirements as part of their school reform package enacted in the latter part of the 1980s has affected the relationship between size of enrollment and curricular offerings in these two critical areas. However, there is concern here that these new state-mandated requirements may have tended to result in the addition of lower level or remedial courses rather than more advanced courses.[5]

The traditional rural school district problem of staffing has been the subject of several works that also tend to confirm many of the observations of Beckner and others, including:

- Reed and Busby's (1985) exploratory effort to examine the nature of teacher incentives in rural schools;
- Wilson and Heim's (1985) study of administrative turnover rates in the rural school districts of Kansas;
- Matthes and Carlson's (1986) examination of why graduates of teacher preparation programs in two states, Iowa and Vermont, chose to teach in rural schools;
- Wood and Kleine's (1987) paper that examined staff development research as it applies to rural school districts;
- Matthes's (1988) beginning work on the conditions for professional practice in four exemplary rural high schools; and
- Stephens and Turner's (1988) description of the quality of work life of the rural school superintendent.

The work underway at the U.S. Department of Education promises to add substantially to our understanding of a number of staffing issues plaguing rural districts. This effort, spearheaded by Joyce D. Stern, a senior program analyst with the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, will be part of a comprehensive congressionally mandated report (Stern, in press). Drawing upon the *Schools and Staffing Survey* (National Center for Education Statistics, 1987-1988), the rural school district staffing characteristics being explored cover such topics as: teacher and administrator characteristics, training, experience, current assignments, and attitudes toward teaching. This work will provide the most comprehensive examination to date of how rural teachers compare with their nonrural counterparts on these topics.

Support for a number of the most significant common impressions of the financial difficulties typically confronting rural districts (e.g., high per-pupil

cost, support for education) reported by Beckner and others is to be found in a growing body of good studies on state and local funding practices and their impact on rural schools.

Dubin's (1989) paper examined differences in spending for public schools between metro and nonmetro areas and among school districts in different types of nonmetro areas. His work represents one of the most definitive to date. Several of Dubin's conclusions are of particular interest to the themes being developed here (emphasis has been added in the following passages):

> On the average, local governments within nonmetro counties spent about *10 percent less per pupil* in average daily attendance on primary and secondary education than local governments within metro counties. The national averages, however, obscure the *huge variation* in education spending among nonmetro counties. Per pupil spending in rural Western counties was about *50 percent higher* than the average for all nonmetro counties, while the more urbanized nonmetro counties in Southern States spent about 37 *percent less* than the nonmetro average. In general, the more *sparsely settled* nonmetro counties based on *agriculture or mining* tended to have higher levels of education spending than other nonmetro counties. Similarly, nonmetro counties which are *not adjacent* to metro counties spent approximately $60 more per pupil than counties which are adjacent.
>
> The expenditure levels found in the sparsely settled nonmetro counties do not necessarily reflect a higher quality of education being offered. Providing public services, including education, to a *relatively small population spread over a wide geographic area entails higher costs* than providing the same service to the same population in a smaller area. Further, nonmetro counties which have been experiencing *outmigration* will incur higher costs if they are using capital facilities designed and built for a larger population.
>
> Per pupil education expenditures are generally lower in nonmetro counties than in metro counties because nonmetro counties generally have *lower levels of income and taxable wealth.* With lower levels of fiscal resources available, nonmetro school districts are constrained to spend less than metro area schools. In addition, nonmetro areas would spend less for education than metro areas, all other things being equal, because these governments cannot fully recapture the benefits of their expenditures. Benefits of expenditures on education accrue to an area over long periods of time. Substantial *outmigration* of younger people reduces the benefits that can be recaptured by the local government.
>
> Intergovernmental aid compensates, to some extent, local areas for their investments in education, and equalizes fiscal resources among jurisdictions. Most states do tend to reduce the disparities in spending among counties within their borders through the allocation of aid. *For the nation as a whole, the system of state aid reduces the relative differences in spending among all counties.*
>
> (Dubin, 1989, pp. 35-36)

Other recent state-specific studies tend to confirm Dubin's conclusions concerning the typically higher per-pupil costs among rural districts and/or the mixed variations in educational spending (e.g., Lows, 1988; Monk, Strike, & Stutz, 1981). An extremely useful discussion of a number of the causes of the conditions cited by Dubin and others that are related to state aid formulas in use by the states is provided by Honeyman, Thompson, and Wood (1989). For example, according to Honeyman and colleagues, a major problem is that *formulas and programs already in existence have not been fully funded.*

A number of recent studies have resulted in filling another long neglected gap in our understanding of the financial dilemmas facing rural schools. The twin issues of the equity and adequacy of state plans for the financing of school district capital outlay programs were explored by Thompson and Stewart (1989). They report that 28 states provided some form of what they regard to be true grant-in-aid programs in 1988, although "a wide variety of participation schemes, resulting in substantial variations in levels of actual support" exists (Thompson & Stewart, 1989, p. 12).

Another collaborative study (Thompson, Stewart, & Camp, 1989) examined school finance in Kansas (a state that is heavily dependent on total local responsibility for capital outlay, like nearly one half of the states). The authors concluded that:

> There appear to be differences in both magnitude and direction of the problems encountered by rural and urban school districts. It is probable that the rural and urban experience in Kansas is substantially specific to the state because of its rural and agricultural complexion, in which classic urban stress is relatively nonexistent.
>
> Its rural problems, however, may be typical of needs found in other rural states (particularly in the Midwest). The problems of rural states point to an origin in declining wealth, narrow tax bases and specialized economies, backlog of maintenance, and suspect relationships between tax base, facilities, educational programs, and equal opportunity. In Kansas taxable wealth ratios exceed 93:1; data from other rural states indicate that this situation is not uncommon (Honeyman et al., 1989). Since many states rely on local property wealth to fund facilities, the problems in Kansas are sufficient to suggest the breadth of rural problems in many other states.
>
> (Thompson, Stewart, & Camp, 1989, p. 75)

Estimates of the magnitude of the problem of capital outlay needs of rural small districts are provided in still another collaborative piece by Honeyman, Wood, Thompson, and Stewart (1988). In this effort, the authors selected a stratified random sample of districts nationwide enrolling fewer than 800 students and located outside a standard metropolitan statistical area. Several of their conclusions are indeed sobering:

> There is an overwhelming inability of local districts to fund capital outlay at levels needed to keep their buildings adequate, safe, and accessible to special populations of students. Evidence exists to suggest that school buildings are deteriorating rapidly and that maintenance needs are increasing concomitantly. Where the average age of buildings exceeds forty years, there is a clear indication that the costs for modernization, replacement, and maintenance will continue to increase from any already high level. As most states do not provide equalization aid in large proportions to local districts for facility purposes, the costs of improvements and replacement of obsolete buildings generally falls to the local property tax mechanism.
>
> Questions as to the adequacy, safety, and access for handicapped students for school buildings reported in this study do have a relationship with the reported levels of deferred maintenance and the computed replacement cost index. The average deferred maintenance reported in this study approached $300,000 per building and over one-half of the districts which responded reported that buildings were considered inadequate for various reasons. The report from this research on rural schools suggests that nationally the cost of deferred maintenance is approximately $2.6 billion and the replacement cost for that 50 percent of the buildings which are inadequate, unsafe, inaccessible or approaching the end of their useful life approaches $18 billion. This problem is compounded by the fact that the majority of the districts which responded are already exercising approximately 50 percent of their allowable limits for capital outlay and 27 percent of the respondents already exercise 100 percent of their limit.
>
> (Honeyman, Wood, Thompson, & Stewart, 1988, pp. 11-12)

The "traditional" problems facing rural schools are manifold. From finance to curriculum to student support services, the concerns of adequacy and equity are evident. No matter how appropriate a state's policy response might otherwise be, unless it addresses these issues, it will not be effective.

The Need to Concentrate on the Characteristics of Effective Schools

The effective schools literature is drawn upon because this body of empirically derived propositions is viewed to represent the best available data on why some schools succeed and others do not. Although some observers caution against the indiscriminate use of this literature (Buttram & Carlson, 1983; Cuban, 1984; Firestone & Herriott, 1982; Miles, Farrar, & Neufeld, 1983), I remain convinced that there is simply too much support for the general propositions advanced for them to be ignored.

The features of this literature relevant to the selection of alternative state policies are numerous. Brief reference will be made here of what are regarded to be three of the best syntheses of this literature to establish the themes of these priorities: the synthesis produced by Purkey and Smith (1982), which included over 100 research studies; the one developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1984); and the one developed by Robinson (1985). Readers are referred to the original sources for a more complete discussion of each of the features mentioned below.

Purkey and Smith. Purkey and Smith's (1982) portrait of an effective school includes nine *organization-structure characteristics*. These are: (1) school-site management, (2) leadership, (3) staff stability, (4) curriculum articulation and organization, (5) staff development that is schoolwide in focus and related to the instructional program, (6) parental support and involvement, (7) recognition of academic excellence, (8) maximized learning time, and (9) district support for school-based improvement efforts.

Their portrait also includes four *process variables* that are nourished by these nine organization-structure variables: (1) collaborative planning and collegial relationships, (2) a sense of community, (3) clear goals and high expectations commonly shared, and (4) order and discipline.

Northwest Lab. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1984) synthesis organizes its equally extensive overview into three sections: the classroom, the school building, and the school district. Selected features of its synthesis in each of these three areas are cited below (see the cited page numbers for the complete discussion in the original source):

- classroom characteristics: use of a preplanned curriculum, high expectations, and learning process is monitored closely (pp. 3-6);
- school building characteristics: strong instructional leadership, clear instructional goals and objectives, grouping of students, firm discipline, high expectations, encouragement of parental involvement (pp. 7-11); and
- school district characteristics: high expectations, district policies and procedures support excellence, student progress monitored regularly, improvement efforts monitored regularly (pp. 12-14).

Robinson. Robinson (1984), as do the others, argues that there are no prescribed formulas or checklists of an effective school. However, his synthesis of the research suggests to him that there are three "important similarities between many instructionally effective schools" (p. 5). These are:

(1) a belief in and commitment to student learning,

(2) a greater sense of control over the learning environment, and

(3) concrete actions that are based on the belief that all children can learn (pp. 5-7).

Robinson's short list emphasizes the general conclusion of the school effectiveness literature that what schools do for students indeed makes a difference. Those who work in or with rural schools are as capable as those who work with schools anywhere of taking this view. This significant body of literature provides a wealth of ideas that those with a commitment to student learning can use to guide improvement efforts.

The Need to Stress the New National Goals for Education

The newly adopted statement on national education goals, while likely to be vigorously debated in the years ahead, nonetheless must be acknowledged by policymakers as they consider policy options for rural school districts. It seems clear that the national and state stakeholders who struggled in an unprecedented way for the adoption of these goals are likely to stay active in seeing that the agenda it embodies comes to fruition.

Four goals seem to me particularly relevant to the selection of alternative state policies pertinent to rural school districts:

- All schools will be expected to increase their high

school graduation rates to 90 percent by the year 2000 (Goal 2).

- Schools will have to assure that their students can demonstrate competency in English, history, and geography (Goal 3) and show extraordinary competency in science and mathematics (Goal 4).
- All schools must be free of drugs and violence and offer a safe and orderly environment (Goal 6).

The potential impact on rural schools of the national goal of having "all children in America" ready to start school (Goal 1) can also be significant. This goal is also consistent with other initiatives that would have the public school assume major responsibilities for early childhood education programs and this is likely to enjoy widespread support.

The Need to Concentrate on the Requirements of the Information Age

The inclusion of the new requirements of the information age as a source of state priorities makes eminent sense in that it suggests the standards by which schools will—and should—be increasingly judged. Moreover, this emphasis will help assure that the selection of alternative policy strategies is directed toward the establishment of a new generation of rural schools, not merely the preservation of an older system that may be of little or no value in meeting the future needs of American society.

The long-term implications of these trends for the curriculum are enormous. Causey (1990) refers to information-processing skills and proficiency in the use of computers as the "new basics" of the anticipated need for lifelong learning. He stresses four skill areas needed for information processing:

(1) Research skills: the ability to search for, access, and retrieve information.

(2) Thinking skills: the ability to analyze, assess, and evaluate information.

(3) Decisionmaking skills: the ability to review available information and make appropriate academic, life-style, career, and value-related decisions.

(4) Problem-solving: the ability to define a problem, collect and analyze data, test hypotheses, and deduce logical conclusions.

(see Caissey, 1989, pp. 42-45)

Many of these same themes are developed by those who have thought about the future, and what must change in the schools if they are to play a significant role (e.g., Cetron, 1989; Newmann, 1988; Pearlman, 1989). In an interesting statement on the future prospects of rural schools in the unfolding information age society, a group representing the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (Gregory, n.d) predicted that, by the year 2020, rural communities will be rapidly growing sites for industries based on technology. They concluded that this eventuality means that rural schools will have to lead society in promoting and developing the sorts of skills listed above.

The Need to Emphasize Student Performance Accountability

It is abundantly clear that the policy communities at the state and national levels are determined to pursue the development of comprehensive assessment programs. As established in the preceding discussion of the redirection of the school excellence movement, the centerpiece of this shift is likely to be a process that holds each school, school system, and the state accountable for student performance in a set of core areas. Indeed, according to Pipho (1990), new mandated "report cards" are now in place in 28 of the 50 states and pending in several more.

The design features of the "first generation" accountability systems being implemented in the states vary. There appears to be a consensus, however, that to be effective, a state assessment system should reflect a number of basic features. It should, foremostly, serve multiple purposes. Cohen's (1988) hopes in this regard are very direct and seem to

capture the intent of most observers:

> First, it should play an important role in policy development. Second, it should mobilize and sustain political support for education. Finally, it should improve education quality.
>
> (Cohen, 1988, p. 584)

Several of these same purposes are cited in the more detailed discussion of preferred basic elements of a state performance accountability system advanced by the State Accountability Study Group, a broad-based team composed of national, state, and local education interest groups assembled by the U.S. Department of Education. In its report, *Creating Responsible and Responsive Accountability Systems* (State Accountability Study Group, 1988), the team stated:

> A performance accountability system is a set of indicators or statistics that provides information about how well schools are performing. Data from the system should allow policymakers to compare performance over time, against standards, and with comparable educational entities (for example, states with other states, schools with other schools). By their choice of indicators, policymakers determine *who* will be held accountable, *for what*, and *to whom*.
>
> (State Accountability Study Group, 1988, p. vii)

There is also a consensus that the student performance accountability systems should make use of indicators, defined by the State Accountability Study Group (1988, p. 5) as "statistics that reveal something about the health or performance of the educational system" and that should "constitute the basic building blocks" of the system.

The Study Group argues further that in order for the accountability system to provide information that is useful for improving schools, the indicators should satisfy six basic criteria; namely, they should:

- measure the central features of schooling,
- measure what is actually being taught or considered important for students to know,
- provide information that is policy-relevant,
- focus on the school site,
- allow for fair comparison, and
- maximize the usefulness of the data collected and minimize the burden of collecting it.

It is in the discussion of issues surrounding the development of meaningful state performance accountability systems where the Study Group raises a number of concerns of direct interest to the primary focus of this review of state priorities—the likely effects these will have on the rural school district component of the state system. Six unresolved dilemmas are posed by the Study Group: (1) balancing oversight and improvement, (2) determining the appropriate level of accountability, (3) balancing statewide comparability with local ownership, (4) expanding the alternatives to traditional standardized tests, (5) making fair comparisons, and (6) ensuring adequate capacity (see State Accountability Study Group, pp. 37-44, for a more complete exposition).

Three of these, in particular, are potentially very troublesome issues for the states. The issue of balancing oversight and improvement will require that (1) a much more extensive system of technical assistance *actually be available* to rural districts and (2) this system be *sufficiently flexible* to accommodate rural district diversity.

The issue of making comparisons both equitable and informative requires that the contextual peculiarities of rural districts be acknowledged, a point stressed in an earlier discussion of another state priority. Finally, the states' capacity to install and operate a performance accountability system will require the states to take extraordinary steps to ensure that rural districts have available requisite computer systems, staff, and resources.

The Need to Make the Rural School the Community Learning Center

It seems clear that schools represent one of the principal resources in most rural communities. They usually have the largest budgets of any local governmental subdivision; are the biggest employer, especially of highly trained personnel; and control the

most comprehensive and specialized physical facilities.

The idea of the greater involvement of the school in the community is, of course, not new. The concept is at the core of the community school movement launched many years ago, as chronicled by Seay (1974).[6] The joint use of school facilities is also one that has been advanced by many observers for some time (Artz, 1970; Finchum, 1967; Gilbert, 1982; Sandberg, McAbee, Bottomly, & McCloskey, 1969). The arguments that were typically made for the community school concept centered on the important considerations of an enrichment of the curriculum, enhancement of the quality of services to the community, and the more efficient use of public tax dollars for community capital improvement programs.

These traditional lines of argument continue to have merit. However, new rationales are being advanced, which, together with the old, suggest an emphasis on the rural school as the community learning center should become a *state priority* of the highest order. A recent paper by Mulkey and Raftery (1990) captures the essence of several of the underpinnings of these new lines of argument.

Mulkey and Raftery tie education to both rural community development and rural economic development, an important dual link given the clear association between the two (though the causal relationship between the two remains uncertain). They define community development as referring to "those changes that increase the capacity of a group of people to identify and act on common interests" (Mulkey & Raftery, 1990, p. 12). They further suggest that economic development is a narrower concept that focuses on "improving community economic vitality, the attempt to increase the capacity of the community to generate income and employment in order to maintain, if not improve, its economic position" (Mulkey & Raftery, 1990, p. 12).

These authors correctly accept the conventional wisdom that holds that an educated work force is a necessary prerequisite to economic development and, in support of their position, cite the work of Deaton and Deaton (1988), Hobbs (1988), and Rosenfeld (1987), among others. Since rural schools are the primary instrument for the development of basic education in the community, it follows that a quality rural school experience is important to the promotion of rural economic development.

The role that Mulkey and Raftery envision for rural schools in rural community development is in many ways even more ambitious, as is to be expected given their broad definition. They synthesize five suggestions on the roles that rural schools can play (see Mulkey & Raftery, 1990, pp. 15-20, for a more complete discussion of these suggestions, together with background sources):

- Rural schools should expand their mission to include the broader education needs of the community.
- Rural schools should teach people, students, and community residents about their community and how it works.
- Schools should focus on preparing rural residents to accept and use modern technology.
- Schools should focus on the development of leadership skills and entrepreneurial abilities.
- Schools should provide leadership in programs designed to increase public awareness of community educational needs and the importance of education to individual and community development.

It seems clear that developing balanced growth policies that would stem the exodus of people into larger population centers by improving the quality of rural life and thereby bring about the revitalization of nonmetropolitan regions of a state makes good policy sense. It seems equally clear that a healthy rural school system that could function as a rural community learning center is an absolute precondition for achievement of this goal.

A recent publication of the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory devoted to the topic of rural schools and their communities makes this case quite succinctly: "A more promising future for rural America will depend upon the quality of its schools" (Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory, 1988, p. 4).

But to argue the importance of quality rural schools for rural revitalization efforts is only part of the issue. As Bryant and Grady (1990) remind us in an insightful essay:

> If the rural schools are to play a role in helping communities sustain themselves, then state education policy needs to support these institutions in that expanded role.
> (Bryant & Grady, 1990, p. 26)

The Need to Redefine the State-Local Partnership Concept

The American public school system, long characterized as a state-local partnership, is unique among western nations. The concept, grounded in the early American tradition of strong local government, has been the subject of much debate over time.

In more recent years, even before the school reform movement of the 1980s, some have questioned whether or not the concept is a myth, given the long line of recent court decisions and the incremental intrusion of federal and state governments into the decisionmaking processes of local schools, especially in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. It seems clear that the shift of authority over education policy to the states during the current school reform movement adds credence to the position that the concept of a state-local partnership has accurately represented the true nature of public education in this nation for some time.

These concerns notwithstanding, the last of the nine needs identified here calls for the resurrection of the state-local partnership as we enter this new decade. Three major lines of argument seem to require that the state and local government strike a new balance of authority and responsibility for education. In no particular order of importance, these are:

- The state must increasingly devote its energies to strategic planning for education. This line of argument—including the design of frameworks to guide the achievement of strategic goals—is unquestionably the most important role that it can play in the improvement of quality in the state system. It is probably the only level of government that can perform these roles successfully over time.

- The state needs a strong and healthy system of local school districts to implement its priorities. The use of sanctions notwithstanding, the state must, in the final analysis, delegate substantial authority to its system of local districts if it is to achieve its strategic goals. Responding to any of the needs examined in this chapter, for example, requires strong local school districts.

- The restructuring movement underway in most states, while still surrounded by ambiguity, is clearly one of the big tidal waves in education and should probably not be viewed merely as one of the frequent ripples that race through education with predictable regularity. The shift of decisionmaking to the building site, to teachers, and to parents—centerpieces of the restructuring movement over which there is little debate—will clearly shift authority over many aspects of education heretofore reserved to the state or to a combination of the state and local school district as a corporate entity. A new state-local partnership will be necessary to accommodate this trend, which, it is important to stress, is likely to accelerate in the decade.

The call for a new commitment for a meaningful state-local partnership in education is also consistent with the perspective of public choice theorists, who would support strong local governments having substantial discretionary authority as the way to increase citizen participation and governmental responsiveness to the preferences of the residents of the community. The resurrection of a true state-local partnership in the field of education is also highly compatible with the partnership approach being argued for increasingly in the broader field of public administration (Zimmerman, 1983).

One of the strongest arguments for a new state-local partnership is made by Timar (1989). After studying the reform efforts in three states that enacted

what most observers would regard to be some of the major comprehensive reform packages—those in California (where a highly decentralized strategy was adopted), South Carolina (where a mixed strategy was used), and Texas (where a strong centralized strategy was employed)—Timar concluded that the most promising state planning was underway in South Carolina. In that state, a meaningful balance exists between state goals and expectations and local district objectives. This led him to argue that state policymakers should better understand the limits of their ability to effect change in the state system of schools, and he urged that states can be most effective when they "establish clear expectations and a general educational framework" (Timar, 1989, p. 27).

Another observation by Timar is of particular interest to an earlier state priority considered here, the need to view the rural district as a system having a number of basic organizational needs. Timar is quite forceful in his caution:

> It does not matter how well-crafted state initiated education policies may be or how much popular support they may enjoy, if schools are incapable of turning those policies into successful programs. High quality educational programs cannot exist in unhealthy institutions.
>
> (Timar, 1989, p. 27)

In another discussion of the reform efforts underway in California, South Carolina, and Texas, Timar and Kirp (1989) offer a second observation that is especially germane to the issues raised here:

> If states are serious about improving the quality of education and striving for excellence, they must create a context in which organizational competence at the school level can develop. That effort will require fundamental redefinition of various organizational roles. The dichotomized view of local control versus state control, for example, will be inappropriate and anachronistic if institutional change becomes the focus of reform. The division of authority between the state and the local schools will no longer be a zero-sum game played out again and again for each specific policy decision. Instead, it will become a cooperative effort aimed at enhancing the organizational competence and institutional effectiveness of the school.
>
> (Timar & Kirp, 1989, p. 511)

Whatever the cause of the growing state authority over education—for example, that it is attributable in part to the public's loss of confidence in the schools (e.g., Kirst, 1988), the pressure for judicial remedies to the pervasive issue of equity (e.g., Honeyman et al., 1989), or other causes put forth—this much seems clear: A new commitment to a state-local partnership in education seems to be an absolute prerequisite to sustained, long-term improvement of public education.

Notes

1. Other meaningful remedies viewed to be tactical remedies are excluded (e.g., the requirement of a rural impact in all proposed state legislative or by-law initiatives).
2. Adopted from an unpublished manual produced by Peter G. Gazzola, project director, for use in an administrator training program in the Tucson Public Schools, 1972-73.
3. For a synthesis of the application of systems theory to an educational setting, see especially Kimbrough and Nunnery (1983), Hoy and Miskel (1987), and Owens (1987).
4. These three principles of system-thinking are fairly standard minimal characteristics of social system concepts.
5. Note that Haller and colleagues used data from the early 1980s, which, of course, predated the implementation of subsequent reforms.
6. For a discussion of the theory of community education and the concept of the community as a learning laboratory, see Totten (1970) and Olsen and Clark (1977).

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CHAPTER FOUR:
Other Important Considerations in the Selection of Alternative Policies

THUS FAR, an attempt has been made (in Chapter 2) to describe a set of new pressures on state systems of elementary-secondary education that suggest that the states will be required in the decade of the 1990s to devote inordinate attention to the needs of rural small school systems. This was followed (in Chapter 3) with the identification of a number of critical needs proposed to guide the development of alternative state policies, along with brief statements of background and rationale for assigning them priority. As helpful as these two necessary background discussions might prove to be, there are other equally important and complicating considerations that also must be included in the shaping of a state's policy response.

Two other concerns in particular must be included in the complex estimation and selection phases of the processes engaged in by state policy communities:

- which *criteria* should be used in the formulation of a state's strategic policy goals for rural education, and
- which *state policy instruments* are available to translate the state's strategic policy goals into tactical objectives or action plans.

This discussion proceeds on the assumption that agreement has already been reached concerning the need to consider how best to define the rural education "problem." Problem definition, of course, is widely judged to be the most important, and initial, consideration that must be undertaken in public policy development. This paper began with the explicit assumption that creating larger enrollment-size rural districts by mandating the reorganization of two or more districts is not the "problem." Rather, this has in the past been the most common *response* to the problem, which, in traditional terms, pertains to the perceived inadequacies—real or imagined—of small-scale schooling in rural areas.

In the context of this discussion of policymaking, therefore, the problem is the development of *strategies to shape a policy response* that will serve the needs of rural school districts in the decade of the 1990s, so that the response is *wiser and more accountable*. This view of the problem is, in fact, inherent in the preceding discussions. All problem statements reflect the values, perceptions, and world view of those who author them. This is no less true here.

The Choice of Criteria for the Selection of Alternatives

The identification of alternatives that are to be considered will go a long way in establishing the parameters of the debate. The criteria used in the selection of alternatives, then, becomes of paramount importance. Discussed below are common criteria used in public policy choices. Acknowledged first, however, is the often murky world of decisionmaking in the policy arena.

The Murky World of Political Decisionmaking

Our knowledge of how public policy decisions are made is at best speculative. The available theoretical approaches to understanding this phenomenon

are limited. Much of the difficulty in understanding why certain policy choices are made, whereas others are rejected, can be explained by the realization that the process of selection is—as Brewer and deLeon (1983) remind us—a political act that, while present in all phases of the policy process, is most evident in the selection (final decisionmaking) phase of public policymaking. Drawing on the work of Crick (1964) and Vickers (1968), Brewer and deLeon continue:

> It is as irrational as rational. It is more art and craft than techniques or science. It involves the use of power as individuals strive to strike a balance between the invented and estimated options that analysts and others have presented for choice and the multiple, changing, and conflicting goals of those having a stake in the problem and the society at large. The resolution, embodied in the choices made and the programs enacted in their behalf, is the primary business of the politician who must balance numerous factors and forces, weigh competing values while applying judgment as to the consequences of acting in certain ways or not acting at all, and then stand ready to accept eventual responsibility measured in terms of continuing public trust in what has been created.
>
> (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 187)

While cautioning against focusing on one of even a small number of "suspected determinants" of public policy choices made by politicians functioning in a political context, Brewer and deLeon (1983, pp. 191-192) assert that the policymaker tends to consider, either consciously or unconsciously, five interrelated factors when settling in on a particular course of action to support:

(1) **context of the problem** (e.g., How is the problem defined? What are the environmental, normative, technological, and political constraints? When and how soon must a decision be made? On what precedents is the decision based?);

(2) **points of leverage** (e.g., Which variables can be manipulated?);

(3) **importance of the problem** (e.g., How much of the decisionmaker's limited time, attention, and political resources will be expended on a given policy; that is, what is the political/cost benefit calculation?);

(4) **availability of information** (e.g., What and how much information is available? Unavailable? What information can be trusted?); and

(5) **personality of the participants** (e.g., What is the temperament of the individual and how do these interact with others? What are the cultural, sociological, and ideological influences on the decisionmaker?).

The important considerations correctly raised in the literature on the "nonrational" aspects of the complexity of the selection process highlighted by Brewer and deLeon and others notwithstanding, the position is taken here that policymakers at some point do employ certain criteria. But which ones should they use? And how should these be weighted? These questions are explored below.

Common Selection Criteria in Use

The selection of alternative ways to address major public policy issues, such as the rural education problem is viewed to be, ordinarily involves the use of certain criteria. Two in particular are standard features of most analysis: cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis. Levin's (1983) definition of each would be generally accepted:

> Cost-effectiveness analysis refers to the evaluation of alternatives according to both their costs and their effects with regard to producing some outcome or set of outcomes.
>
> Cost-benefit analysis refers to the evaluation of alternatives according to a comparison of both their costs and benefits when each is measured in monetary terms.
>
> (Levin, 1983, pp. 17, 21)

A third criterion that is also a standard feature of most analysis is the use of equity considerations in the exploration of alternatives. There seems to be unanimity that the measure of equity is the fairness of both the effects and efforts of public policies.

These three criteria give prominence to the need to reflect technical, economic, and legal rationality in

the identification of alternatives. Few would argue that these emphases are not necessary and appropriate. But public policies, by their very nature, involve values (Anderson, 1984; Gilliott, 1984; Lasswell, 1971; Young, 1977) and this should lead to the use of criteria that reflect other forms of rationality.

Dunn's (1981) work is especially valuable in arguing for the use of three additional criteria for the analysis of alternative policies. The three are adequacy, responsiveness, and appropriateness, which Dunn defines as follows:

Adequacy is the extent to which any given level of effectiveness of alternative policies satisfies the needs, values, or opportunities that the policy is intended to address.

Responsiveness is the extent to which alternative policies satisfy the needs, preferences, or values of those that are to benefit from the policy objective.

Appropriateness refers to the value or worth of the objective of the policy and whether or not the assumptions underlying these objectives are appropriate for society.

(see Dunn, 1981, pp. 236-238)

Dunn's advocacy of the use of the criterion of appropriateness is especially insightful for complex policy issues such as the establishment of alternatives for addressing rural education matters:

> While all other criteria take objectives for granted...the criterion of appropriateness asks whether these objectives are proper ones for society. To answer this question analysts may consider all criteria together—that is, reflect on the relations among multiple forms of rationality—and apply higher-order criteria (metacriteria) that are logically prior to those of effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, and responsiveness.
>
> The criterion of appropriateness is necessarily open indeed, since by definition it is intended to go beyond any set of existing criteria. For this reason there is not and cannot be a standard definition of the criterion of appropriateness.
>
> (Dunn, 1981, p. 238)

Dunn's emphasis on the three criteria of adequacy, responsiveness, and appropriateness clearly complicates the selection of alternatives. Nonetheless, they force into the debate two other forms of rationality that are judged to be essential considerations in public policymaking. As defined by Dunn, these are:

- **social rationality**—choices based on a comparison of policy alternatives according to their ability to maintain or improve valued institutions in the society; and
- **substantive rationality**—choices based on a comparison of multiple forms of rationality in order to make informed judgments in particular cases and under particular circumstances.

(Dunn, 1981, p. 226)

The arguments put forth by Kerr (1976) in her discussion of selection criteria are also valuable, and they reinforce a number of the points stressed by Dunn. She argues for the use of four tests of justification[1] or conditions "that must be true to say that a policy choice is justifiable of being supported on nonarbitrary grounds" (Kerr, 1976, p. 171). The four tests are:

(1) The **desirability** test. The policy must promote the development of "beliefs, attitudes, skills, dispositions, values, or tasks" that are viewed to contribute to an attribute of some consensus about the "Good Life."

(2) The **effectiveness** test. The choice of a policy is more likely than any other choice to achieve the purpose of the policy.

(3) The **justness** test. The purpose of the policy, when achieved, must be just.

(4) The **tolerability** test. The costs of the choice, in both resource expenditure and undesirable results, must be tolerable when measured by three additional tests: proportionality, less costly, and acceptability (of undesirable side effects).

Kerr also discusses the importance of sequencing her four tests of justification:

> The order in which these tasks are introduced

is at variance with the order in which they would logically be applied in that the justness test was found to take precedence over the desirability test. Further, it should be noted that there is no point in applying the effectiveness test if a policy did not pass the desirability test. The tests of justifiability would then, logically, be applied in this order: (1) the justness test, (2) the desirability test, (3) the effectiveness test, and (4) the tolerability test.

(Kerr, 1976, pp. 172-173)

The Availability of State Policy Instruments

The inclusion of multiple, frequently competing criteria in the selection of alternative state policies for addressing the issues surrounding rural, small school districts and the ultimate weighting assigned to each will substantially raise the quality of the debate about what course of action to pursue. However, the choice of what options to use must also include consideration of the policy instruments ordinarily available to the state to translate strategic policy goals into tactical objectives and action plans. A discussion of this equally complex issue is provided below.

A General Framework: The McDonnell-Elmore Typology

McDonnell and Elmore (1987) developed a useful conceptual framework for classifying alternative instruments or mechanisms that states make use of in translating strategic policy goals into tactical objectives or action plans. The four generic classes of instruments in their framework are:

(1) **Mandates** are rules governing the action of individuals and agencies, intended to produce compliance.

(2) **Inducements** comprise the transfer of money to individuals or agencies in return for certain actions.

(3) **Capacity-building** is the transfer of money for the purpose of investment in material, intellectual, or human resources.

(4) **System-changing** is the transfer of official authority among individuals and agencies to alter the system by which public goods and services are delivered.

(McDonnell & Elmore, 1987, p. 2)

The authors' discussion of the costs and benefits and selected examples of the four instruments are presented in Table 6. Their consideration of the major assumptions that appear to underlie each of the four generic instruments in their typology and the consequences of the use of each are presented in Table 7. McDonnell and Elmore seem to have correctly captured a number of essential considerations in the choice of criteria and alternative strategies available to the states.

Equally valuable is their attempt to frame propositions concerning under what conditions policymakers prefer the use of one or more types of instruments as opposed to others. One of their major hypotheses about this question is that choice seems to be influenced by (1) how the policy issue is defined and (2) the resources available and the existing constraints (e.g., institutional context, government capacity, fiscal resources, political support or opposition, available information, and tradition) (see McDonnell & Elmore, 1987, pp. 19-26, for a more complete discussion of this point).

Modifications in the McDonnell-Elmore Typology

The McDonnell-Elmore typology is an especially valuable framework for use in consideration of the assumptions made in the use of the major forms of state policy instruments, the relative strengths and weaknesses of each, and their consequences. Equally important, their approach suggests the direction of further hypothesis development and testing that ought to result in substantially greater insight into the complexities of public policy decisionmaking.

Offered below, however, is a modest extension of the basic McDonnell-Elmore typology, which, I believe, enhances its utility in the present context. This is done in two principal ways:

- through the identification of other commonly used examples of several of the four generic

Table 6
Characteristics of Policy Instruments

Instrument	Primary Elements	Expected Effects	Costs	Benefits	Examples
Mandates	Rules	Compliance	Initiators: Enforcement Targets: Compliance Avoidance	Specific benefits to individuals Diffuse benefits to society	Environmental regulation Nondiscrimination requirements Speed limits
Inducements	Money (procurement)	Production of value (short-term returns)	Initiators: Production Oversight Displacement Producers: Overhead Matching Avoidance	Initiators/ producers: Increased budget authority Clients: value received	Grants-in-aid to governments In-kind grants to individuals
Capacity-Building	Money (investment)	Enhancement of skill, competence (long-term returns)	Short-term costs to initiating government	Short-term, specific benefits to receiving agency; long-term, diffuse benefits to society	Basic research Preservation
System-Changing	Authority	Composition of public delivery system; incentive	Loss of authority by established deliverers	Gain in authority by new deliverers	Vouchers Deinstitutionalizaton New providers (HMOs, community mental health agencies)

Source: McDonnell, L.M., & Elmore, R. F. (1987). *Alternative policy options.* New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Policy Research in Education, Rutgers University (p.8).

Table 7
Assumptions and Consequences of Policy Instruments

Instrument	Assumptions	Consequences
Mandates	(1) Action required regardless of capacity; good in its own right (2) Action would not occur with desired frequency or consistency without rule	Coercion required; create uniformity; reduce variation. Policy contains information necessary for compliance; adversarial relations between initiators, targets; minimum standards
Inducements	(1) Valued good would not be produced with desired frequency or consistency in absence of additional money (2) Individuals, agencies vary in capacity to produce; money elicits performance	Capacity exists; money needed to mobilize it; as tolerable range of variation narrows, oversight costs increase; most likely to work when capacity exists
Capacity-Building	(1) Knowledge, skill, competence required to produce future value; or (2) Capacity good in its own right or instrumental to other purposes	Capacity does not exist; investment needed to mobilize it; tangible present benefits serve as proxies for future, intangible benefits
System-Changing	(1) Existing institutions, existing incentives cannot produce desired results (2) Changing distribution of authority changes what is produced	Institutional factors incite action; provokes defensive response; new institutions raise new problems of mandates, inducements, capacities

Source: McDonnell, L. M., & Elmore, R. F. (1987). *Alternative policy options.* New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Policy Research in Education, Rutgers University (p. 13).

classes of instruments, and

- by the addition of a fifth class that is viewed to represent still another powerful policy instrument available to the states.

These modifications are shown in Table 8.

In the past, the states have made use of a variety of mandating procedures. A number of the categories from the six-point scale used by Wirt and Kirst (1982) in their study of the nature and extent of state control over education are useful in discriminating variations in the use of state power (e.g., as in mandates) to affect achievement of a state policy goal. Three of the six categories in particular are important here.

The Wirt and Kirst study, which examined state constitutions, existing statutes, and court decisions, looked especially for instances in which:

(1) there was local autonomy, but the local district must do something about a policy;

(2) there was extensive local option under a state-mandated requirement; and

(3) there was limited local autonomy under a state-mandated requirement.

These points appear as modifications to the McDonnell-Elmore typology in the first row ("mandates") of the second column ("modifications") of Table 8. Thus, they distinguish three types of mandates available to state policymakers.

Further, I would add one new category of generic policy instruments to the McDonnell-Elmore typology, and modify two others, based on the discussion of Chapter 2. In that chapter I identified four major approaches that were used either singularly or in combination in many states:

(1) the enactment of legislation promoting reorganization (three major variants: mandatory legislation, permissive legislation, semipermissive legislation);

(2) enactment of state aid formulas containing fiscal incentives and disincentives;

(3) the enactment of new or strengthened standards for the operation of districts (especially those concerned with the scope of the program, personnel, facilities, and the financial aspects of district operation); and

(4) the use of extra-legal measures to promote attainment of the same policy goal (especially the advocacy of reorganization by the professional communities, by many in academe, and state officials).

The first three of these could be classified by the McDonnell-Elmore typology, although without modification the use of *fiscal disincentives,* a potentially powerful strategy in earlier school reorganization efforts, cannot. Disincentives appear in Table 8, in the second row ("inducements") of column two ("modifications"), where they distinguish yet another policy instrument. Similarly, I have, in the third row of Table 8 ("capacity-building") further specified a *particular type* of capacity-building previously mentioned in earlier chapters of this book: the investment of monies for enhancing the ability of people to engage in planning and problem-solving at the local level.

Finally, the fourth category of strategies mentioned in Chapter 2 (and summarized above)— "extra-legal" strategies—deserves special attention. In that chapter, it was argued that the fourth strategy, seldom considered in the reorganization literature, was perhaps the most influential and effective of all, in that it more than likely precipitated, in many instances, invocation of the other three. Thus, the fifth policy option in the modified typology of policy instruments (Table 8) is advocacy, the strong endorsement and support by a public official at the state level for the adoption by others of a course of action.

Table 8
A Modified Typology of State Policy Instruments

Policy Instruments	Modifications:
1. Mandates rules governing the action of individuals and agencies, intended to produce compliance	• add required local autonomy but local must do something • add extensive local option under state-mandated requirement • add limited local option under a state-mandated requirement
2. Inducements the transfer of money to individuals or agencies in return for certain actions	• add the withholding of monies; that is, disincentives for certain action taken
3. Capacity-Building the transfer of money for the purpose of investment in material, intellectual, or human resources	• add the investment of monies for enhancing the ability of locals to engage in planning and problem-solving
4. System-Changing the transfer of official authority among individuals and agencies to alter the system by which public goods and services are delivered	
5. Advocacy the strong endorsement and support by a public official at the state level for the adoption by others of a course of action	

Notes

1. See Kerr, 1976, pp. 171-192, for a more detailed discussion of these tests.

2. Other attempts to delineate the many faces of the use of force to affect state policy goals include what Brewer and deLeon (1983), in citing the work of Siu (1979), call the "push-pulling of power." Their examples include many that could be placed in the McDonnell-Elmore typology (e.g., threatening, bribing), as well as some that would not be so easily typed (e.g., elimination). Several other of their illustrations of the use of force are similar to the bully-pulpit or extra-legal strategy (e.g., cajoling, persuasion) (see Brewer & deLeon, 1983, pp. 223-24). Of course, the rich organizational change and organizational development literature is also particularly pertinent to the discussion of policy instruments available to the states to translate strategic goals into action plans.

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CHAPTER FIVE:
Major State Policy Options

ONE INTENT of the framework developed in this book is to identify state policy options for improving rural, small school districts other than through mandated district reorganization. To be most useful, the range of options to be considered must address both *existing* needs, as well as those likely *in the future* to confront rural districts and, more generally, the state system of elementary-secondary education.

One profile of what these needs might be was developed in Chapter 3. To review briefly, this profile included nine foci, as follows: (1) viewing the rural school district as a *system* having interrelated parts and basic organizational needs, with the attendant implications for making an investment in organizational development; (2) addressing the great *diversity* among rural districts; (3) addressing *traditional problems* facing rural districts; (4) concentrating on the characteristics of *effective schools*; (5) stressing the *national goals* for education; (6) concentrating on the requirements of the *information age;* (7) the need to establish more meaningful student performance *accountability systems;* (8) making the rural school the *community learning center;* and (9) redefining the *state-local partnership* in education.

The first three of these needs tend to address *existing pressures* on state systems, and the remaining six reflect anticipated *new pressures* on state systems in the decade of the 1990s. Although many of the latter group, especially, apply to urban and suburban school districts, the state policy communities must also ponder the consequences for the large—and increasingly vulnerable—rural school district component of the various state educational systems.

Furthermore, the choices among state strategies that are ordinarily available in the design of policy options are not finite. Two constraints, however, may limit such choices. One possible constraint is the degree to which policy choices *satisfy certain selection criteria* that ought to guide policy formulation in education and other fields. A second is the *benefits and costs* of the use of policy instruments available to move from the statement of state strategic goals to tactical objectives, or action plans. The nature of these further considerations was explored in Chapter 4.

The Eight Featured Policy Options

Within this background, Chapter 5 identifies eight major policy options as ways that the state can bring about improvements in the quality of rural education, a goal that is critical for a healthy, viable state school system as we approach the next millennium. The eight classes of options considered are:

(1) promote interdistrict relations,

(2) promote school district-postsecondary relations,

(3) promote school district-other interorganizational relations,

(4) promote school district partnerships,

(5) expand direct state services,

(6) use distance-learning technologies,

(7) change the financial support base for rural education, and

(8) allow greater local school district discretionary authority.

The first six options are directed primarily toward

improving the delivery of services to rural districts. The seventh is directed primarily toward improving the fiscal posture of rural systems, although other options can also contribute indirectly to this outcome. The final option is primarily designed to enhance the capacity of rural, small school districts to become contributing members of a new state and local partnership that is vital to the furtherance of education generally.

Variations and Combinations of the Options

The discussion that follows provides a brief description of each policy option, organized around major variations that appear to be most useful in addressing one or more of the priorities facing state systems of schools. There are, of course, any number of possible variations for each option, and treating each option and the major variations independently, as is done here, could give the impression that I am arguing that they must be considered as independent, noncomplementary strategies. This, of course, is not the case. My position, rather, is that the problems of rural schools are so pervasive that the development of comprehensive, integrated, and cohesive multiple policies is required.

Moreover, I realize that the tendency of the policy communities to pick and choose from among multiple alternatives will prevail. Decisionmaking occurs within an essentially political context, through which policymakers tend to weight and select options by assessing them against their assumed political feasibility, their compatibility with the political traditions of the state, and a host of other considerations, as well as their perceived educational benefits and costs—points that were stressed in previous chapters.

Options Excluded

Before proceeding with the descriptions, mention is made below of several options that would probably be cited by others but are not considered here. This discussion includes a brief rationale for their exclusion.

Five policy options, a number of them presently having substantial support, are excluded from consideration here. The first, the promotion of cross-district *parental choice options*, clearly enjoys widespread political support. In the past few years, a number of states have enacted legislation that allows students, under a variety of conditions, to enroll in schools other than in their home district.[1] Aside from my own grave personal concerns about the wisdom of this option, and the questionable validity of the assumptions of those who support this form of choice, it is excluded here because it seems designed primarily to benefit students, not the rural school district, and so is beyond the immediate scope of this book.

The second excluded option, which seems to be increasingly argued for by some as the way to improve conditions in nonmetropolitan areas, is the so-called small-town *triage strategy* discussed by Lapping, Daniels, and Keller (1989). The goal of the triage strategy is "to make public spending achieve economies of scale in the provision of public services and build up population centers that can be self-sufficient in the long run" (Lapping, Daniels, & Keller, 1989, p. 297). Its use would give lowest priority in state planning to stagnant towns that are remote and dependent on natural resources for their primary economic activity, and are thus not considered likely to prosper in the future. This option is not considered here because the intent of this exercise is to establish policy options that will assist all rural districts, not just those that are presently favored by economic conditions, geography, or proximity to large urban centers.[2]

The third excluded option concerns the creation of *residential schools* whereby rural students would be boarded during the school year. While this solution may have some merit in extremely remote regions, it is regarded to be so contrary to the norms of this society that it is not considered a viable policy alternative, at least in the foreseeable future. However, one of the variations that is considered, state-operated regional schools, could incorporate features of the residential school if the regional coverage of such institutions were extensive.

The fourth excluded option concerns the possible *privatization* of all or parts of public elementary or secondary education in rural areas. This extension of public choice theory does not at present appear to enjoy any sizable degree of political support, primarily because it is so antithetical to the longstanding American commitment to public education.

The final option excluded is the often unstated

policy of *doing nothing*. This option is, in fact, widely recognized in the literature as a legitimate policy choice. Some observers hold the view that rural America and, by extension, rural education, cannot be saved. According to this view, some unspecified natural law, in operation for much of recent history, will lead to the inevitable decline and eventual disappearance of rural America. Advocates of this view hold that market forces ought to be allowed to function without obstruction and that government intervention, no matter how creative, will be ineffective in the long term. The position is taken here that legal requirements on the states alone will force a state response of some type. That is, the state's responsibility for education means it has no choice but to address the problem actively, even should it be tempted, for whatever reason, to adopt a laissez-faire attitude.

Promoting Interdistrict Relations

The states can select from a number of different forms of interdistrict relations. The major variations of this option appear to be promoting:

- Two or more rural school districts jointly establish a school for a single-purpose function (e.g., school for the handicapped, or gifted and talented, or vocational-technical education).
- Two or more rural districts jointly establish a comprehensive junior/middle, senior high school, or combined secondary school.
- Two or more rural districts engage in sharing agreements whereby whole grades are exchanged and/or administrators and staff are jointly employed.
- Regional limited-purpose educational service centers that are created to provide a small number of specialized services to rural districts in their service area. District participation could be voluntary or mandatory.
- Regional comprehensive educational service centers that are created to provide a wide range of direct instructional services to students enrolled in rural districts, as well as instructional and management support services to the districts in their service area. District participation could be voluntary or mandatory for one or more or all of the programs offered by the centers.

Discussion of Variations

All five of the alternatives of interdistrict relations cited here are, of course, not new in that many states have promoted one or more of them for some time, in some cases implementing different variations simultaneously. For example, Pennsylvania has had a number of joint interdistrict vocational-technical schools for several decades.

The promotion of regional comprehensive junior/middle or senior high school districts was a common strategy used in earlier times in the New England states, and in a small number of other states (e.g., California, Illinois, and New Jersey) that to the present time continue to operate some separate elementary and high school districts and have not created a statewide system of unified, K-12 districts common in most states. To implement the strategy elsewhere, states would need to require or encourage unified K-12 rural districts to be, as Davidson (1976, p. 126) said, "willing to give up their identities as organizations, at least regarding the specific domain(s) in which the cooperation has occurred." This strategy would be viewed by most observers as the ultimate form of interdistrict relations.

State promotion of sharing of whole grades and of administrators is probably most extensive at the present time in Iowa. In the 1989-90 school year, 100 of the state's 431 districts shared a superintendent, and 84 districts were engaged in whole grade sharing. Huge increases in the number of each type of arrangment have taken place in the state (only ten cases of each type were in existence as recently as five years ago), due in large part to relatively substantial state financial inducements to do so (Iowa State Department of Education, 1990). The intent of state support for these arrangements in Iowa appears to be the hope that they will ultimately lead to the reorganization of the cooperating districts. At this time, a number of other states (e.g., Minnesota, North Dakota) are also promoting sharing arrangements that are intended to

result in the consideration of reorganization by the participating parties.

State promotion of limited-purpose educational service centers is at present most extensive in the states of Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Minnesota, each with either an entire statewide system of regional centers or with a substantial number of local school districts in the state served by one. Participation is generally voluntary in the programs offered by the units. The programs offered tend to be limited to programs for handicapped children, staff development, and curriculum development. State financial support is generally limited, frequently consisting of monies for the employment of a chief executive officer and for the maintenance of an office staff. The general expectation is that the participating districts will share the costs of services in which they voluntarily choose to collaborate (Stephens, 1989).

State promotion of comprehensive educational service centers is presently most extensive in the 13 states of California, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. All were created by statute. All local school districts in the states hold membership in a service unit, except in New York, where the five districts with the largest enrollments are excluded. Although all districts might hold membership, participation in the services of the centers can, however, be either voluntary or required. The services of the centers can vary substantially across the states, as well as within a single state. In an earlier report, I developed a program classification system that categorizes the wide range of services offered by service units of this type to local districts (Stephens, 1979). It has continuing utility today. The five categories used and the most dominant examples of each appear below:

- direct instructional services to students enrolled in local school districts (e.g., programs for exceptional children, vocational-technical programs);
- indirect instructional support services to local districts (e.g., staff development, curriculum development, media);
- management support services to local districts (e.g., planning, data processing);
- services to nonpublic schools (e.g., programs for exceptional children, staff development, media); and
- services to the state education agency (e.g., certification, data collection). (Stephens, 1979, p. 126)

A number of the variations of interdistrict relations used here would be subsumed in Sederberg's (1988) concept of a "federated district." Sederberg's promotion of the concept was, in part, influenced by concerns about the feasibility of district pairing and shared superintendent arrangements being promoted in Minnesota in the mid-1980s. His preference is for neighboring rural communities to continue to maintain their elementary schools and school boards but join together to create a federated district that would have a separate governing body that would, among other roles, operate a regional secondary school.

One of the five variations in particular, the sharing of staff or students or both, has for some years been advocated by Nachtigal in his work at the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (e.g., Nachtigal, n.d.). Interdistrict sharing arrangements are also given prominence in an earlier report by Bussard and Green (1981) of the Educational Facilities Laboratory for the U.S. Department of Education. This report explored alternatives for single high school districts with declining enrollment.

While the variations considered here are used fairly extensively at the present time in a number of states, it is also true that a large number of states with many rural school districts have, so far, made little use of these variations. The discussion (in Chapter 1) of pressures on the states, however, would suggest that a renewed state interest may be forthcoming. Moreover, it seems clear that local school district opposition to any state initiatives in this direction has also largely disappeared. In an earlier work (Stephens, 1988), I reviewed what appears to be a consensus in the literature concerning factors that cause an organization to seek out or be receptive to engage in relations with another organization:

- when the organization is faced with a situation of resource scarcity or other perceived need;
- when the organizational leadership perceives the benefits to outweigh the costs;
- when the organization has a common mission and perceives that attainment of its goals is more likely to be realized through interorganizational arrangements than by acting alone;
- when there is a history of good relations, a positive view of the other, and both are in close geographic proximity;
- when the organization can maintain its organizational identity;
- when the organization members can maintain their prestige and authority; and
- when the organization has few or no other alternatives.

(Stephens, 1988, p. 14)

These seven core propositions represent a consensus of what is regarded to be the best of the work done on interorganizational relations (Crandall, 1977; Halpert, 1982; Levin & White, 1961; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1980; Rodgers & Whetten, 1982; Schermerhorn, 1975; Van de Ven, 1976; Warren, 1967; Yin & Gwaltney, 1981). The seven propositions also suggest what form of interdistrict relations is likely to be most receptive to rural local school districts.

Implementation. Whatever type of interdistrict arrangement is decided on, attention must be paid to implementation. Direct reference to this issue has received scant attention by specialists in the field, however. Therefore, an additional proposition is needed. This proposition in particular flows from my own study and observation of state and local planning and implementation efforts to promote interorganizational arrangements, which have extended over two decades (Stephens, 1967, 1975, 1979, 1987):

> The successful implementation of widespread interorganizational arrangements is dependent upon a strategy of using state-induced external incentives to motivate local decision makers to seek out or be receptive to such efforts.

State-induced incentives can take several forms. At a minimum, the pronouncement of a state policy commitment to promote interdistrict relations is required. So, too, is the development and use of state-sponsored planning guidelines that would establish a clear rationale for the functional areas that lend themselves to sharing. Such guidelines should also include a statement of criteria on the preferred interdistrict organizational configurations. Another prerequisite is the provision of financial incentives, especially when this is coupled with the denial of monies in the state aid program for districts that persist in unilaterally expending state funds for programs in areas previously established as those lending themselves best to a form of interdistrict arrangement.

Promoting School District-Postsecondary Relations

In this option, public postsecondary institutions would be used to provide certain programs and services to rural, small school districts. The main variations of the use of this strategy appear to be the use of:

- area community colleges to assume responsibility for senior high school level vocational-technical programs,
- both area community colleges and four-year institutions to provide advanced placement senior high school courses in the sciences and in the arts and humanities,
- faculty of both types of postsecondary institutions to provide curriculum consultant and organizational development services to rural local districts, and
- the facilities of both types of institutions to provide specialized instructional support (e.g., media) and management support (e.g., data processing) services to rural systems.[8]

Discussion of Variations

There are, at present, approximately 3,100 postsecondary institutions in the nation. Of this number, about 40 percent are either public four-year

(461) or two-year (865) institutions. Many of these also maintain branch campuses, thus increasing the number of physical locations. These public institutions, in addition to the even larger number of privately controlled four- and two-year colleges (1,829), represent a huge resource in all of the states.[4] Support for more meaningful relationships between elementary-secondary and postsecondary education is, of course, not new, but it has received renewed attention recently.[5] Many factors have contributed to this new interest.

The unfolding debate about the quality of public elementary-secondary education, which has occupied center stage for much of the past decade and continues unabated to this day, is certainly one. Another is the growing acceptance among college and university faculty and administrators and others of the realization that the quality of postsecondary education is highly dependent on the quality of the schools that prepare students for colleges and universities.

Illustration of this new perspective, or perhaps the new recommitment, is to be found in a recent report by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Building for a New Century: Higher Education in West Virginia* (Carnegie Foundation, 1989). Although the report focused on postsecondary education, its first priority was the strengthening of the quality of precollegiate education in the state. The report argued:

> The quality of higher education can rise no higher than the quality of the public schools. It is during the twelve years of basic education that a solid academic foundation must be laid. If there is a failure to give young children the tools they need academically to succeed, it is almost impossible fully to compensate for the deficiencies later on. It is for this reason that we focus first, and with urgency, on elementary and secondary education.
>
> (Carnegie Foundation, 1989, p. 1)

A recent essay in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* expresses the hopes of a professor at Brown University for a renewed interface between postsecondary institutions and high schools. This statement may well be more significant than any of the long lists now appearing of specific examples about how precollegiate and collegiate institutions can cooperate:

> The greatest gift that we can give high schools is to help them foster in their students the spirit of inquiry that blesses American higher education at its best.
>
> (Damon, 1990, p. A48)

Damon then provides examples of how the wealth of resources to be found on many colleges campuses can assist in focusing inquiry among both high school students and faculty:

> Colleges could launch collaborative research programs that include high-school teachers as colleagues and their students as apprentices. Colleges could initiate more exchange programs that send college faculty members out to the high schools and bring high-school teachers into the colleges. Short-term student exchanges, with carefully defined roles for both sets of students, could prove to be inspiring and educational for all involved. Colleges could lend or donate their lab equipment, library materials, and other research resources to high schools for joint projects. And college faculty members could help high-school teachers continue their own education by giving them information about obtaining grants and fellowships.
>
> (Damon, 1990, p. A48)

The use of a number of the four variations considered here for improving rural schools would, naturally, be constrained by the accessibility of rural districts to a campus. For example, participation of high school students in vocational-technical programs offered by two-year institutions or their enrollment in advanced placement courses would ordinarily be restricted to those students who attend rural schools within a reasonable commuting distance, probably in the range of 60 to 90 minutes' driving time. Fulltime summer residential programs would help overcome this barrier, however. The specific examples cited of the use of the faculty and facilities of postsecondary institutions, as in Damon's discussion, would be less affected by concerns about accessibility to students.

Promoting School District-Other Local Interorganizational Relations

In this option, the rural school district and other public rural community services providers would be encouraged to join resources for the provision of services to children, youth, and adults. The chief variations of this strategy appear to be:

- the joint sponsorship of program planning by the school district and other rural local human services providers;
- the joint planning by the school district and other community services (e.g., libraries, recreation, museums, transportation);
- the complete integration of education and other human services providers; and
- the complete integration of education and other community services (e.g., libraries, recreation, museums, transportation).

Discussion of Variations

There are examples of existing joint program planning between rural school districts and other rural human services providers, as well as other rural community services, many of these dating back many years. While apparently not widespread, the most common existing efforts appear to entail joint planning of school facilities to accommodate:

- both school and community recreational needs,
- both the school and community library programs, and
- other community space needs (e.g., community meetings).

The complete integration of school and other local human services is probably most extensive at the present time with regard to the merger of the school lunch program with food services for the elderly. There are also some examples in which the rural school transportation program has assumed responsibility for providing a mass transportation system for the community.[6]

The barriers to greater collaboration between the schools and other human services and community services are significant. In a recent report that tended to be focused on collaboration in the human services field, Levy and Copple (1989) cited a long list of factors:

> The barriers to successful collaboration between education and human services are many and imposing—restrictive laws, regulations, and policies; categorical funding streams; large and complex organizational structures; very different jurisdictional boundaries and lack of comparability between governance structures; differing professional orientations, training, and vocabulary; competing pressures and priorities; "turfism"; the difficulty of establishing intersystem accountability; and the time and resources the collaborative process itself absorbs.
>
> (Levy & Copple, 1989, p. 15)

The barriers to collaboration between education and other community service agencies of local governments are in many ways equally imposing. However, the passage of authorizing state legislation allowing interlocal governmental agreements and contracts, a movement first promoted by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations in the mid-1960s, has removed most major legal barriers (see ACIR's *A Handbook for Interlocal Agreements and Contracts*, 1967a). Congressional passage of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act of 1970 (Public Law 91-648, 1971), which was also subsequently modeled in many states, removed still another major legal obstacle to relationships between education and other local community service agencies.

Both Levy and Copple and others who have thought about the issues (Lonsdale, 1960; Reller, 1961; Ringer, 1976; Stephens, 1966), however, are uniformly optimistic that most of the barriers can be surmounted and that successful collaborative programs can be forged if a commitment by local leadership to do so is present. The work by Ringer, though now 15 years old, is especially useful because of the inclusion of a comprehensive list of typical problems encountered in these arrangements. It also provides guidelines for their resolution.

A more recent work that is rich in its discussion of the origins of many of the barriers to collaboration cited by Levy and Copple is the text by Zeigler, Kehoe, and Reisman (1985). These authors examined the relationships between school superintendents and city managers, clearly key to collaborative efforts. While most rural communities do not have city managers, the insights provided by Zeigler and his colleagues concerning the nature of some of the tensions between the two units of local governments are applicable in most communities, irrespective of size.

The role of the states in promoting collaboration between rural schools and other local interorganizational agencies is, of course, critical for promoting collaborative planning and essential for the two most ambitious variations identified above (the complete integration of local services). Many states have for some time maintained state-local mechanisms that provide a platform for joint planning between education and other human services agencies. One of the nation's earliest legislatively established state commissions having a charge to consider a full range of rural issues is the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, chartered in New York State in 1982 (see note 6 for accessible sources that summarize the Commission's work).

Promoting School District Partnerships

This strategy calls for the state to encourage rural school districts and both public and private organizations to create partnerships whereby the non-school organization would provide equipment, services, or funds to the school. Potential partnerships could be developed with the following entities:

- businesses and business organizations;
- civic organizations, service clubs, and religious organizations; and
- private individuals and volunteer agencies.

Two other types of potential partnerships—with postsecondary institutions and with other government agencies—were considered previously.

Discussion of Variations

Rural, small school districts, especially those in remote, sparsely populated, or economically declining regions, will be handicapped in pursuing partnerships. However, many rural districts can benefit and apparently presently are (Heaviside & Farris, 1989). Moreover, it could be that even those currently handicapped districts will benefit from the clearly emerging new commitment of the nation's business and industrial communities to support education. In a recent piece, Chris Pipho identified eight major recently launched initiatives that lead him to believe "the leaders of U.S. business are poised for a decade-long alliance with education" (Pipho, 1990, p. 582). He cites the efforts underway by the Business Roundtable, the National Alliance of Business, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Council of Aid to Education, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Business-Higher Education Forum, the Conference Board, and the Committee for Economic Development. This level of commitment is perhaps unprecedented in history. It could result in substantial broad-based support for education.

Rural school districts could benefit from this commitment. According to Heaviside and Farris (1989), many of the existing partnerships have focused on academic areas that have historically been difficult for rural schools and will increasingly be so in the future: math and science demonstrations, guest speakers, donations of computers, and academic tutoring. Providing awards and scholarships for students and teachers is also common.

Expanding Direct State Services

State education agencies have engaged in the direct provision of services to school systems for many decades.[7] This has been especially so since enactment of the Elementary-Secondary Education Act of 1965, the massive federal aid program emanating from President Johnson's "Great Society" legislative program. One of the provisions of this act, Title V, provided monies for state education agencies to enhance their ability to serve in a leadership capacity

to improve the state system of schools.[8]

In this option, not just the state education agency, but also other state administrative departments having a mission in the health, welfare, and human resources development fields could be required to provide certain services needed by rural, small districts. Major variations of this option considered here are:

- expanded technical assistance in education fields;
- expanded technical assistance in other human resources fields (e.g., health, social services, vocational-technical training);
- state-operated regional programs offering direct instructional services to students (e.g., vocational-technical, handicapped, math and science);
- state-operated regional programs offering instructional support services to districts (e.g., staff development, curriculum development, media); and
- state-operated regional programs offering management support services to districts (e.g., transportation, data processing, purchasing, planning).

Discussion of Variations

Perhaps one of the most ambitious examples of a state education agency providing direct services to local systems is in North Carolina, where, since 1977, the state has operated a system of eight regional offices. In 1989, each of the eight regional centers—funded entirely by state sources—was staffed by 15 professionals who provided an extensive range of technical assistance to local districts within the center's service region. The workscopes of 10 "core staff members" were determined by the state agency; they were fairly uniform in all eight centers. The workscopes of the remaining five staff members were determined by local administrators, based on their perception of regional priorities.

In the mid-1970s, Massachusetts established six regional branches in an effort to provide more direct technical assistance to the school systems in the Commonwealth. However, in the late 1980s, this network has been reduced as a result of fiscal pressures on state government; its future remains clouded.

Another state, Ohio, has maintained an ambitious program of regional technical assistance centers in special education, vocational-technical education, data processing, and transportation for many years. A number of other states operate single-purpose regional centers. For example, Louisiana established a state system of eight regional staff development centers early in the 1980s. Newly enacted legislation in Kentucky (House Bill No. 940, 1990) will create a similar state system of a yet-to-be-determined number of regional staff development centers, beginning with the 1991-92 school year.

The latest version of the U.S. Department of Education's Wall Chart (1990) indicates that 10 states now operate and fund regional or state schools that provide direct instructional services to students (Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia). Several of these programs, which represent what some would classify as another "choice" option, are residential programs. The primary focus of most, however, is on an enriched science and mathematics program for gifted students.

Using Distance Learning Technologies

Under this option the state would support the development and ultimate installation of telecommunications technologies having potential for enriching the instructional offerings available to students, as well as expanding staff development opportunities for the faculties employed by rural districts. The principal options here include:

- the use of noninteractive audio (radio, audiotape) and video (open broadcast television, one-way cable television, videotape, instructional television, one-way satellite television) technologies for direct instructional services for students;
- the use of interactive audio (telephone, audio teleconferencing) and video (microwave, two-way cable television, electronic blackboard, two-

way satellite television, video teleconferencing) technologies for direct instructional services for students;

- the use of noninteractive audio and video technologies for instructional support services for teachers; and
- the use of interactive audio and video technologies for instructional support services for teachers.[9]

Discussion of Variations

The growth of telecommunications technologies in the last half of the decade of the 1980s is, of course, one of the most vivid and promising innovations in recent history. The new technologies hold great potential for effecting major change in rural education. Even those who express caution concerning the potential value of telecommunications technologies for promoting rural economic development acknowledge that rural education is likely to benefit substantially from the new, more powerful, less costly technologies (Chin, 1989).

Barker's (1987) definition of the term "distance learning technologies" is fairly straightforward:

> Distance learning technologies...refer to the live, simultaneous transmission of a master teacher's lesson from a host classroom or studio to multiple receiving site classrooms in distant locations. Two-way live communication, whether audio or video, between the teacher and students makes the instruction interactive.
>
> (Barker, 1987, p. 1)

In a more recent report to Congress, *Linking for Learning: A New Course for Education*, the Office of Technology Assessment (1989) expands on Barker's definition:

> Technology transports information, not people. Distances between teachers and students are bridged with an array of familiar technology as well as the new machines of the information age. What sets today's distance education efforts apart from previous attempts is "the possibility of an interactive capacity that provides learner and teacher with needed feedback, including the opportunity to dialogue, clarify, or assess." Distance learning relationships can be maintained in many ways from the simple exchanging of printed material via post or facsimile to two-way interactive, cross-continental television or computer networks.
>
> (Office of Technology Assessment, 1989, pp. 1-2)

The Office of Technology Assessment attributes the rapid spread of telecommunications technologies to two factors:

> Specific educational needs can be met. One need is the provision of instruction in mandated courses or advanced, specialized courses in schools where teachers are not available or are too costly to provide for a limited number of students. A second need is the provision of training and staff development for teachers in locations where experts and resources are difficult to obtain.
>
> Recent rapid development of technology has resulted in systems that are powerful, flexible, and increasingly affordable. The base of available technology resources is increasing. Information technologies continue to develop with dramatic speed. Possibilities for audio and visual interaction are increasingly wide. Much has been learned about connecting various forms of technology into systems, so that the ability to link systems one to another is growing.
>
> (Office of Tehcnology Assessment, 1989, pp. 2-3)

The types of technologies available for distance learning are also growing rapidly. In his 1987 review, Barker cited as the most common types, audio teleconferencing and interactive television. The 1989 report of the Office of Technology Assessment, moreover, reminds us that "most distance learning systems are hybrids, combining several technologies" (Office of Technology Assessment, 1989, p. 6).

According to Barker, in the past few years a number of instructional television satellite systems have offered a wide range of high school credit courses and staff development programs, and two-way audio and two-way interactive television systems have offered both elementary and secondary courses in addition to staff development programs.

In a later article reporting the results of an exploratory study on the effectiveness of instructional television satellite programs, Barker and Patrick (1989)

identify the TI-IN Network as the largest producer of satellite course offerings in 1988. In that year, the Network offered 100 hours of live programming each week to 524 sites in 26 states, offering 20 different high school courses and 400 hours of staff development over the course of the year. Other major producers of high school credit courses offered via satellite include: Oklahoma State University's Arts and Sciences Teleconferencing Service; the SCI-STAR program from Avon, Connecticut; and Satellite Telecommunications Educational Programming from Spokane, Washington (Barker & Patrick, 1989).

The implementation of distance learning technologies is increasingly being supported by individual states (e.g., Alaska, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, Texas) and consortia of multi-states through participation in the federally funded Star Schools Program. The hopes of state leaders for distance learning technologies have been forcefully expressed by James R. Moss (1988), the chief state school officer in Utah, in commenting on the prospects of educational reform in his state:

> Implementing these reforms within the constraints of skyrocketing enrollment and limited financial resources has meant that technology must play a key role in the reform of education in Utah. Indeed, technology is already changing the ways in which teachers teach and students learn in Utah. Major developments in satellite delivery systems, in technology-driven writing labs, in computer-assisted instruction for distance learning, in instructional television, and in laser-disk-based instruction are providing support for classroom learning even as they transform the learning process. Developments in these "high-tech" areas have helped individualize instruction, have helped rural teachers become expert in several subjects, and have made remediation and immediate feedback possible for at-risk students, especially those in isolated settings.
>
> (Moss, 1988, pp. 25-26)

Moss concludes his brief essay with this useful insight on the promise of technology generally:

> Technology is not the sole solution to the challenges confronting education in Utah. But without it, no other solution will be entirely successful. Technology is both a far-reaching education reform and a facilitator of other reforms. It may well be the best investment we can make to insure our future educational excellence.
>
> (Moss, 1988, p. 26)

The role of the states in facilitating or inhibiting distance learning was the focus of a recent study by Holznagel and Olson (1989). According to this study, states can support distance education with monetary support, teacher training programs, technical assistance, and the use of educational programming and telecommunications systems. They can remove barriers to the use of distance learning technologies by modifying rules on class size, teacher certification, and course requirements.

Changing the Financial Support Base of Rural Education

The six preceding options are intended primarily to improve the delivery of needed services to rural school districts. This option is designed to provide rural systems with the most fundamental of needs, adequate fiscal resources to conduct a high-quality educational program. In this option, the state would promote changes in the way rural school districts are funded. Five principal variations are considered:

- a weighted student enrollment factor in state allocations formulas to account for higher unit costs due to smaller enrollments,
- inclusion of local effort as well as local ability in the design of state equalization aid programs,
- the use of state categorical or flat-grant aid programs for staff recruitment and capital outlay,
- the use of a regional equalization tax to provide minimum foundation support for core programs for all districts in a geographic region, and
- the use of full-state funding (defined here to mean at least 90 percent of the costs of education) for all school districts in the state.[10]

Discussion of Variations

It seems clear that the latest round of ferment in state school finance, which began in the mid-1980s

and accelerated in the latter part of the decade, will continue into the 1990s. This latest interest in the equity of state school finance programs not only shows promise of exceeding the volume of legal challenges that swept the nation in the early 1970s, but promises to be far more significant in the precedents established. Rural school interests are in the forefront of this litigation in a number of states (e.g., Kentucky, Montana, North Dakota,Tennessee).

The need to acknowledge the clearly higher unit costs associated with some programs and services (frequently required by the state) offered by rural, small districts, the first of the four variations cited here, has long been advocated by many. Higher unit costs are especially characteristic of many advanced senior high courses, administrative and instructional support services, and transportation. Some states for a number of years have acknowledged this need through the use of various forms of assistance.

In an exploratory study of special state funding for small and/or isolated rural schools, Wright (1981) reported that 24 states made use of a form of special funding. He divided his analysis of these arrangements into two broad categories: *eligibility* for assistance and *type* of assistance. Eligibility requirements used by some of the 24 states at the beginning of the 1980s included:

- a level of enrollment factor based on size of enrollment (district, elementary, or secondary);
- a minimum number of teachers;
- population density or sparsity;
- an isolation factor; and
- an effort factor.

Types of special assistance provided by some states included:

- added weightings for basic support,
- a minimum support level for low enrollment districts, and
- special allocations for regional K-12 districts.

(See Wright, 1981, pp. 4-10, for more details)

In a more recent report on financing rural education, Honeyman, Thompson, and Wood (1989), citing data from a comprehensive study of state finance programs in the United States and Canada (Salmon, Dawson, Lawton, & Johns, 1988), report that 28 states (in the U.S.) currently adjust for sparsity in their state formulas, whether the formula is a minimum foundation plan or an equalization plan. A number of illustrations used by Honeyman and colleagues are especially useful and are cited below (the examples are all based on state practices in place in 1986-87, the base year of the profiles developed by Salmon and colleagues):

- North Dakota, which applies a weighting factor to high school enrollment at 1.2 FTE, allows high schools with fewer than 75 pupils to count an additional 0.5 FTE for state aid purposes. North Dakota also allows districts to count students in one-teacher, one-room elementary schools at 1.30 FTE.
- Texas allows school districts with fewer than 130 pupils to use 130 as a "minimum" average daily attendance (ADA), with additional allowance for districts serving an area of over 300 square miles in extent.
- Florida adjusts FTEs for sparsely populated districts (fewer than 14,000 FTE) as one of 53 "cost factor" adjustments, and Nebraska adds 10 percent, 20 percent, 30 percent, and 40 percent to the basic need formula for districts with 4, 3, 2, or 1 persons per square mile.
- North Carolina adjusts the pupil-teacher ratio for sparsely populated areas, and Wyoming—for qualified rural districts—allows adjustments in each weighted student category, according to the number of students in membership. Under this arrangement, the lower the membership, the higher the weight applied to count pupils.
- Maine allows adjustments for the high cost of operations in certain geographic regions and small school units.
- Oregon makes grants to "approved and necessary" small schools.
- Iowa adjusts the FTE by 0.5 for districts that share teachers for economic reasons.

- South Dakota reduces the required mill ratio for small districts.

The use of a weighted enrollment or other sparsity factor, such as those cited above, to address the demonstrably higher unit costs of rural, small school districts does not, of course, in itself assure equity.[11] Moreover, whether or not they pass the adequacy test is quite another matter.

The inclusion of local effort as well as local ability in the design of state equalization programs has also been advocated. The use of some measure of local effort would help assure that a local district's contribution in support of education is measured not only by its ability to generate revenues, but also reflects its willingness to underwrite a fair share of the costs of education. Its inclusion would address the frequent circumstance in nonmetropolitan regions where local effort (in comparison to ability to pay) exceeds what other communities are willing to contribute to education. Similarly, the acknowledgment of local effort would also not reward those communities who chose not to support education at the same level of commitment as their counterparts in other parts of the state.[12]

As discussed by Honeyman and colleagues (1989), most formula equalization plans are based on certain assumptions that may be used separately or in combination:

- The state sets a uniform cost of education and determines the local tax effort required to meet certain stated minimum cost (often referred to as a "minimum foundation plan").
- The state allows local districts to determine their own costs and then adjusts funding to reflect differences in the wealth of the local districts (often referred to as "equalizing" or "guaranteed tax-base" plans).

(Honeyman et al., 1989, p. 13)

Neither of these assumptions nor those made in the use of other state plans— such as flat grant aid programs or categorical aid programs—truly incorporates local effort considerations. The omission of local effort is, of course, in part due to the continued use of local property tax levies as the principal source of local revenues for education. The effects of using this arguable measure of wealth are frequently compounded by the continuation in a number of states of uneven property *assessment* practices.

The third variation in this option, the use of a regional equalization tax to provide minimum foundation support for core programs, extends a concept already partially implemented in some public service fields, including education. For example, regional taxing authorities are already in place to support usually single-purpose public service functions in such areas as transportation, water control, and recreation.

In education, regional educational service agencies in California, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, and Oregon have for some time had taxing authority to support some of their programs and services offered their constituent local school districts (Stephens, 1979). In all cases, only limited taxing authority is enjoyed by the service centers.

The concept of an areawide tax base for financing education was advocated by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations nearly a quarter of a century ago (ACIR, 1967b). While the interests of the Commission were directed toward metropolitan regions, its arguments for consideration of the proposal seem today to be equally appropriate for metropolitan and nonmetropolitan regions:

> If the fabric of the American federal system of government is to be preserved, our metropolitan communities, which are becoming increasingly interdependent economically, must adjust to more of an areawide approach to the financing of public services, especially education which trains much of the future manpower supply of the area as a whole.
>
> (ACIR, 1967b, p. 9)

Full-state funding of education, the final variation of this option, is a concept that has enjoyed various levels of interest for several decades. The height of interest in the concept—which is ordinarily defined to mean state support for 90 percent of the costs of education (Thomas, Jewell, & Wise, 1970)—probably occurred in the litigious early 1970s. At that time a number of state supreme courts struck down existing school finance programs following two precedent cases, one in California (*Serrano v. Priest*, 1971), and the other in New Jersey (*Robinson v. Cahill*, 1973). Inequality of educational opportunity in a state was the prime

concern of those in the legal profession, such as Silard and Goldstein (1974), who—together with education finance experts—argued for an abandonment of local funding of education.

Most proponents of full-state funding argue for the *centralization* of school finance programs, but the continued *decentralization* of substantial decisionmaking authority (i.e., decisionmaking that would increasingly rest with local school districts). The state of Hawaii, which has but one school district, is the only state at present that approaches the 90 percent standard used in the working definition of full-state funding used here (estimated to be 91.2 percent in 1987-88). Two other states, New Mexico and Washington, both provided over 70 percent state support in that same year. The national average two years ago was 50.19 percent (National Education Association, 1988).

Allowing Greater Local School District Discretionary Authority

The use of this option would require that the state allow rural districts substantial discretionary authority to adapt state regulations to accommodate local objectives and local contextual considerations. The principal ways this could be accomplished appear to be allowing greater local discretionary authority in:

- meeting state curricular goals,
- satisfying state graduation requirements,
- satsifying staff certification requirements, and
- meeting state requirements—if any—for length of school day, week, and year.

Discussion of Variations

All four of these variations are highly consistent with the traditional concept of local control of education. They call for the delegation of discretionary authority to rural local districts to make certain modifications within the frameworks established by the state in four critical areas. They would not deny the state the authority to establish frameworks and to develop very prescriptive regulations in other areas where the state has had a continuing interest, such as establishing rigorous financial accounting and auditing procedures and in the close monitoring of fire and other building safety provisions (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, & Usdan, 1990; Wirt & Kirst, 1982).

Each variation addresses multiple needs. The first three, in particular, are intended to achieve the following objectives:

(1) to provide meaningful relief to rural districts in areas that have always been difficult for them but especially so as a result of the many state-enacted omnibus education reform packages enacted in the first wave of school reform that tended to be highly prescriptive;

(2) to help set the stage for the full development of meaningful school-based structuring efforts within a district (indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the promising potential of restructuring can be achieved without first providing the school district with substantial authority in the three areas cited); and

(3) to allow rural districts greater ability to use the community as a learning laboratory to enrich the curriculum (e.g., Hobbs, 1988).

Limiting the state's responsibility to provide frameworks in the three areas is consistent with the increasing realization by some observers in both the policy and school improvement communities that there are clear limits to the use of state authority to prescribe long-term school reform, no matter how compelling the need.

Granting rural school districts greater discretionary authority to work within any state requirements governing the length of the school day, week, and year, the fourth variation considered here, would meet needs similar to those met by the first three variations. However, this variation is also intended to allow rural districts the opportunity to explore additional ways to enrich student experience, to facilitate staff and other organizational development efforts, and to achieve cost savings. The experience of the four-day school week in Colorado and several other states, while born from the energy crisis that hit the nation in the late 1970s, is one highly visible example of how rural districts can—given a degree of flexibility by the state—work within certain constraints (e.g., the need to conserve fuel) and reap other benefits as well (Richburg & Edelen, 1981).

Notes

1. According to Nathan (1989), five states in 1989 allow parents to enroll students in any district of the state: Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Ohio. State funds follow the student to the receiving school district.

2. It is interesting to speculate about whether or not the use of some of the eight options explored here could, in the future, contribute in important ways to a favored position of some communities over others. However, this is not the primary goal of those options that seem to have this potential. Moreover, it is accepted here that economic considerations will continue to be the essential driving force that influences the ultimate, long-term health of a community. Education ought not to be, indeed, probably cannot be, the initial focus of efforts to save a rural community.

3. All four of these variations fall short of what would be regarded as the ultimate form of school-postsecondary relations, the total management of a school district by a postsecondary institution as in the case of Boston University's relationship with the neighboring Chelsea district.

4. Data compiled from the *Digest of Educational Statistics 1989* (Snyder, 1989), Tables 196 and 198, pp. 217 and 219, respectively.

5. For an earlier discussion, see, for example, *Continuity and Discontinuity* (1973), a report by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, for a good review of the need for closer relationships and recommended ways to effect closer ties between schools.

6. One recent example of such rural community transportation system is that created under the auspices of the New York State Legislative commission on Rural Resources (NYSLCRR), reported in the Commission's 1988 annual report (NYSLCR, 1988a) and described more fully in *Integrating School Transportation Resources into Coordinated Rural Public Transportation Programs* (NYSLCR, 1988b).

7. For a good history of the roles played by state education, see *Education in the states: Nationwide developments since 1900* (1969).

8. Jerome Murphy's (1974) work probably represents the most definitive study of how state education agencies used their Title V funds.

9. There certainly is no shortage of classification systems used to type available technologies. The one used here was developed by the American Association of Educational Service Agencies in 1987 and appears to be as comprehensive as most of those found in the literature on this type that obviously is expanding rapidly.

10. Changes in federal aid programs for rural school districts has been the focus of a number of proposals over time; see especially Sher (1978) and Bass and Berman (1979).

11. One of the most comprehensive studies of the effects of weighted pupil finance programs was completed by Leppert and Routh (1980). Their study included the three states of Florida, New Mexico, and Utah.

12. Admittedly, the inclusion of local effort in state aid programs will prove to be difficult given the seemingly troublesome problem of arriving at uniform measures of what ordinarily ought to be relatively straightforward—the definition of expenditures and the statistical definition of measures of dispersion. For a discussion of the variations of the use of each, see especially Berne and Stiefel (1984) and Odden, Berne, and Stiefel (1979).

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CHAPTER SIX:
Estimating Effects (An Illustrative Application)

THIS BOOK has now completed its major objective, the development of a framework to help policymakers consider alternatives that can help develop rural, small school districts so they can, in years to come, provide excellent educational programs to their communities. This framework delineates the following contexts of policymaking that surround the complex issue that is the subject of this book, namely:

- the contemporary and historical context of social, economic, and educational change;
- emerging priorities in rural education;
- the context of policymaking (specifically, criteria for assessing policy options and a typology of relevant policy instruments); and
- specific policy options available to the states for use in improving rural education.

The Need to Apply the Framework

This framework could be applied in a number of ways, and discussion might end here, with readers left to devise their own applications. For example, there is a body of research literature that could be assessed for its implications for policymaking in the present context. That assessment would be an interesting exercise, but would probably require a treatment of several hundred pages. Such a treatment would review the new literature on the effects of organizational scale, the comparative achievement of rural students in small schools, creative initiatives of rural teachers and administrators, and the long-term outmigration to the cities of students educated in rural schools (among many similar themes). A work like this is no doubt needed: It could contribute as much to the national debate about the ends and means of education as the works produced by the Study of High Schools (e.g., Sizer, 1985). Obviously, such an approach is completely beyond the scope of this book and would, in fact, be a challenge for any individual author.

An Illustrative Application

What this chapter *will* do is illustrate one method to estimate the effects of each of the main variations of the eight options proposed in the last chapter. The estimations are, however, *necessarily* speculative, because they are projections, and policymaking involves projections. We have not, as yet, discovered how to do post hoc analyses on the future, and our best efforts are systematic projections based on our knowledge of the past and present (Dunn, 1981).

This exercise is intended to illustrate one way to approach decisionmaking on a more rational basis. Readers should note, that although the effects presented here are estimated by the author alone, similar ratings could be generated by *groups* of policymakers or other stakeholders. Indeed, some of the *details* of the framework could also be adapted to fit local or state contexts—that is, the new pressures, the suggested priorities, and the alternative options could also be adjusted as needed, despite their apparent face validity at the moment.

Specific Approach

This chapter shows how effects might be estimated from three perspectives provided by the framework (see Figure 3):

- their ability to address each of the state priorities emphasized here,
- their ability to address the policy selection criteria identified here as those that ought to guide policy formulations, and
- the benefits and costs of the use of primary policy instrument(s) required to implement the options.

This approach recognizes that, first, there are always many variables to consider in the determination of benefits and costs. Some are situational, varying not only between, but within states, as well. The geography of a state might, for example, directly affect certain selection criteria (e.g., cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit) but not necessarily others (e.g., adequacy). Other variables—the distribution of two-year or four-year postsecondary institutions in a particular state, for example—would not only affect benefits and costs, but the availability of certain policy instruments, as well.

Second, this approach also recognizes that previously completed cost evaluations, of whatever type, must be applied warily. Beyond local differences, there are other concerns regarding the applicability of work done in other settings. According to one writer,

> Two problems arise in considering the consequences of other studies for informing decisionmakers on similar problems that they face in their own settings. The first question is whether the study or report that is under consideration is an adequate analysis in terms of the standard requirements for such a work. The second is the degree to which the results of that study can be generalized to the present setting.
>
> (Levin, 1983, p. 137)

Levin does not argue categorically against the use of prior cost studies. His ten-point checklist of criteria for evaluating the utility of prior work, however, implies the need for *extreme* caution (Levin, 1983).

Again, *the analyses that follow are illustrative*. The important feature is not the assessment of the present author, but the illustration of method.

Cautions in Using the Illustrative Applications

These applications are—once again—necessarily subjective. Nonetheless, I have undertaken them for two reasons. First, I agree with Dunn's observation that the intuitive forecasting of policy alternatives is "particularly useful and even necessary" under certain circumstances (Dunn, 1981, p. 159). The policy framework developed here as a response to "the rural school problem" satisfies some of the conditions that, according to Dunn, warrant the use of subjective judgment:

> Since one of the characteristics of ill-structured problems is that policy alternatives and their consequences are unknown, it follows that in such circumstances there are no relevant theories and/or empirical data to make a forecast.
>
> (Dunn, 1981, p. 195)

My second reason for pursuing this exercise relates to the overriding hope with which this book began. That is, my goal has been to develop broad conceptual and analytical frameworks to help guide the more detailed work that must go into developing state policy responses to the needs of rural, small schools. Therefore, these illustrations are intended to provide examples of how the framework could be employed to promote more rigorous state assessment and evaluation efforts.

Estimating Effects by Options' Ability to Address State Priority Needs

The first of the three approaches for estimating the possible effects of the use of the eight classes of state options considers the perceived impact of the use of each when judged against its ability to address the nine state priority needs widely regarded to be critical in 1991.

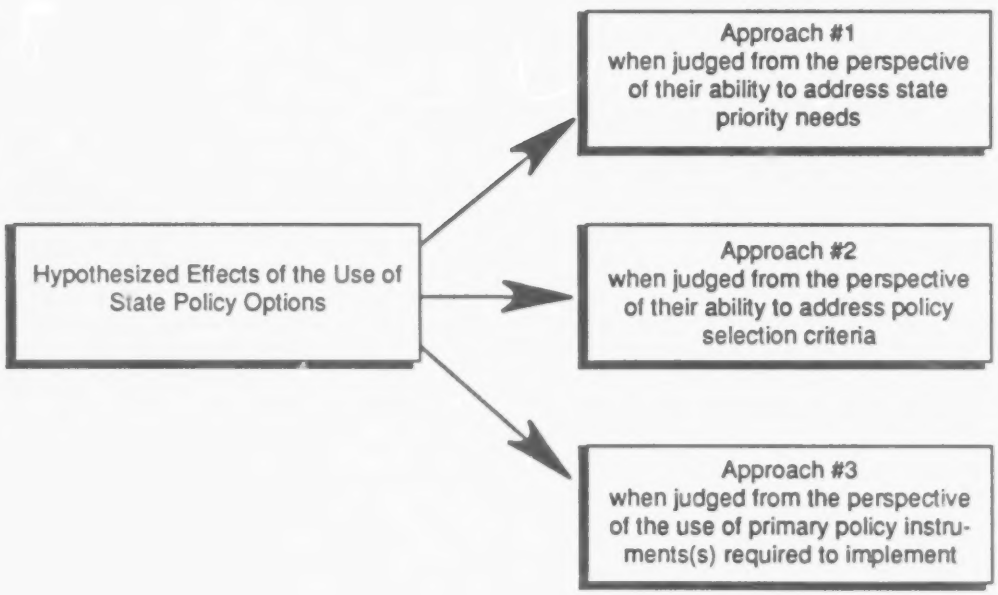
Procedures and Caveats

Not all of the many features of the nine state priorities receive equal weight here. Those that are given prominence are identified in figure 4.

The following scale will be used to estimate the effects of each policy quantitatively:

- supportive (4) or nonsupportive (-4) of promoting *all* of the major dimensions of each of the priority needs,

Figure 3
The Three Approaches Used to Illustrate the Hypothesized Effects of the Use of the Eight State Policy Options


Hypothesized Effects of the Use of State Policy Options
Approach #1 when judged from the perspective of their ability to address state priority needs
Approach #2 when judged from the perspective of their ability to address policy selection criteria
Approach #3 when judged from the perspective of the use of primary policy instruments(s) required to implement

- support (3) or nonsupportive (-3) of promoting *a substantial majority* of the major dimensions of the priority need,
- supportive (2) or nonsupportive (-2) of promoting *a majority* of the major dimensions of the priority need,
- supportive (1) or nonsupportive (-1) of promoting *some* of the major dimensions of the priority need, and
- (0)—will not promote or inhibit.

Perhaps the strongest case for this procedure is that it imposes consistency across all three assessments (i.e., this one and the two that follow). Readers should, however, remember that the framework is a tool for considering what is essentially a complex, ill-structured problem; a degree of artificiality and subjectivity are warranted (Dunn, 1981).

It is not intended that these ratings be used to compare variations, either within a particular option or across options. Again, the purpose of this exercise is illustrative. Statistical objections aside, it is clear that any such judgments must be made on the basis of the social, economic, political, and educational conditions that exist in each state. As noted previously, such conditions vary widely, affecting certain criteria systematically and, in some cases, putting some policy instruments out of reach.

Discussion of Hypothesized Effects

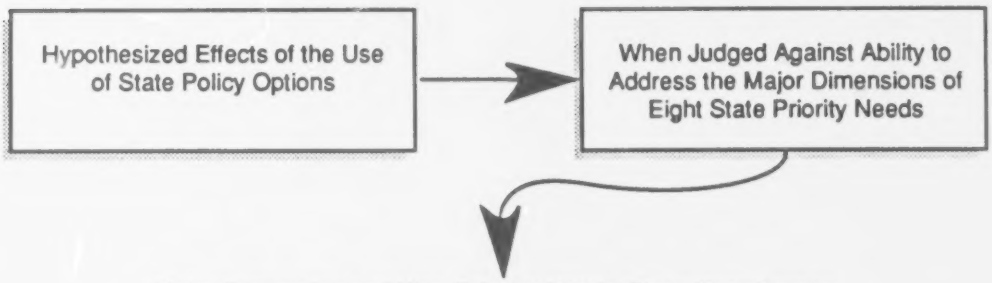
When judged by their ability to address variations that would transfer major programs from one district to another organization, the hypothesized effects would result in altering the system and its prior organizational identity. According to this illustrative assessment, some of these options, however, have few drawbacks for districts, whereas, with others, the drawbacks may outweigh the advantages (see Table 9).

This assessment also suggests that changes in the financial support base of rural districts is consistent with some of the nine needs discussed in Chapter 3. While debate about the link between funding levels and student achievement continues in some quarters, it is clear that revenues available to many rural systems have historically been deficient, thus placing constraints upon their ability to offer quality programs. It makes sense that these systems stand a better chance of responding successfully to many of the new state priorities if they had more adequate and equitable funding.

Assessment of the potential impact of the 34 variations (of the eight policy options) against specific dimensions of each of the nine needs (see Chapter 3), rather than viewing their effects against each need as a whole, is still another way of exploring their potential value. A few examples are provided below to illustrate this approach:

- The need to strengthen staff development in rural school districts could be addressed by the use of comprehensive service agencies; by area college facilities; by the state education agency; and, importantly, by the use of both noninteractive and interactive audio-video technologies. In addition to staff development, other features of a strong instructional support system for rural districts could be put in place by the use of several of these same variations.
- The need to strengthen math and science programs could be addressed by the use of regional comprehensive schools, by area college facilities, by state-operated regional math and science schools, and by interactive audio-video technologies.
- Vocational-technical programs could benefit from the use of all five main variations of interdistrict relations used here. Where proximity allows, rural districts could shift their vocational-technical programs to area community colleges.
- Early childhood education, now included in the national goals for education, could benefit from the integration of rural schools and other human services and community services organizations.

Figure 4
Focus of Approach #1: Hypothesized Effects of the Use of Policy Options When Judged Against Ability to Address State Priority Needs


Hypothesized Effects of the Use of State Policy Options
When Judged Against Ability to Address the Major Dimensions of Eight State Priority Needs

Major Dimensions of Nine Priority Needs Given Prominence

- Addressing the Rural School District as a System
  especially: all organizational-structural and process characteristics; basic needs of the organization, including organizational development
- Addressing the Diversity Among Rural School Districts
  especially: economic status; population size; urban orientation; homogeneity of social values; political structure
- Addressing Traditional Problems of Rural School Districts
  especially: program depth and breadth; staff recruitment and retention; lack of financial resources
- Addressing Characteristics of Effective Schools
  especially: school-site management; staff development; staff stability; curriculum articulation; parental involvement; order and safety
- Addressing National Goals of Education
  especially: graduation rates; English, history, geography programs; math and science programs; early childhood program; longer school year
- Addressing Requirements of Information Age Society
  especially: computer skills; higher-order thinking skills
- Addressing Student Performance Accountability
  especially: comprehensive assessment programs; comprehensive accreditation standards
- Addressing School as Community Learning Center
  especially: availability of program, staff, equipment, facilities, and fiscal resources to serve all community age groups
- Addressing "New" State-Local Partnership
  especially: the state establishing strategic goals while allowing local districts discretionary authority to design tactical objectives within state frameworks

Table 9
Hypothesized Effects of the Use of Policy Options When Judged Against Their Ability to Address State Priority Needs

State Policy Options Considered	State Priority Needs: Rural District as a System	Diversity Among Rural Districts	Traditional Rural Problems	Characteristics of Effective Schools	National Goals of Education	Requirements of Information Age	Student Performance Accountability	School as Community Learning Center	"New" State-Local Partnership
Interdistrict Relations									
regional single-purpose schools	-1	0	1	1	1	1	1	-1	1
regional comprehensive secondary schools	-2	0	3	2	2	2	2	-2	1
sharing whole grade and/or staff	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	0	1
limited-purpose service center	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
comprehensive service centers	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	1
School District-Postsecondary Relations									
area community colleges offer voc/tech program	-1	1	2	1	2	2	1	-2	1
area colleges offer advanced placement courses	-2	1	2	1	3	3	1	-2	1
area college faculty offer technical assistance	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
area college facilities offer support services	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
School District-Other Local Interorganizational									
joint planning-other human resources	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
joint planning-other community services	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
integration-other human services	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
integration-other community services	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
School District-Partnerships									
business and business organizations	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
civic, service, and religious organizations	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
private individuals, volunteer organizations	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
Direct State Services									
technical assistance-education	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
technical assistance-other human resources	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
state-operated regional instructional programs	-2	0	2	1	2	2	2	-2	1
state-operated regional instructional support	-1	0	1	1	1	1	1	-1	1
state-operated regional management support	-1	0	1	1	1	1	1	-1	1

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Table 9
(Continued)

State Policy Options Considered	Rural District as a System	Diversity Among Rural Districts	Traditional Rural Problems	Characteristics of Effective Schools	National Goals of Education	Requirements of Information Age	Student Performance Accountability	School as Learning Community	"New" State-Local Partnership
	State Priority Needs								
Distance Learning Technologies									
noninteractive audio—instruction	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	3	2
noninteractive audio—instructional support	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2
interactive audio—instruction	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	3	2
interactive audio—instructional support	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2
Changes in Financial Support Base									
weighted student enrollment factor	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	2
inclusion of local effort and local ability	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	3
categorical aid for staff and capital outlay	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	2	3
regional equalization tax for core program	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	3
full-state funding for core program	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	3
Local District Discretionary Authority									
state curriculum goals	4	4	3	2	2	2	3	2	4
state graduation requirements	4	4	3	2	2	2	3	2	4
state staff certification requirements	4	4	3	2	2	2	3	2	3
state requirements for length of day, week, year	4	4	3	2	2	2	3	2	4

LEGEND

- supportive (4) or nonsupportive (-4) of promoting *all* of the major dimensions of the priority need
- supportive (3) or nonsupportive (-3) of promoting *substantial majority* of major dimensions of the priority need
- supportive (2) or nonsupportive (-2) of promoting *majority* of major dimensions of the priority need
- supportive (1) or nonsupportive (-1) of promoting *some* of major dimensions of the priority need
- neutral (0) — will not promote or inhibit

Estimating Effects by Ability to Meet Policy Selection Criteria

The second of the approaches elaborated here considers perceived impact when judged against the ability to address the six policy selection criteria regarded to be critical in public policy choices.

Procedures Used in the Assessment

The following scale denotes the estimated effects of each policy with a numerical system:

- highly supportive (3) or nonsupportive (-3) of promoting achievement of each criteria,
- moderately supportive (2) or moderately nonsupportive (-2) of promoting achievement of each of the criteria,
- limited support (1) or limited nonsupport (-1) of promoting achievement of each of the criteria,
- neutral (0)—will not promote or inhibit, and
- N/E—no estimate established.

The procedure here is both more and less complex than the procedure in the preceding exercise. It is simpler because it involves a one-to-one estimation (a single variation, a single criterion) and not a single variation against the major dimensions of a multifaceted state priority. How one interprets some of the six criteria is difficult: While estimating effects against the cost-effectiveness criterion is comparatively straightforward, providing estimates of that impact upon the other five criteria is a more difficult challenge.

Providing cost-benefit estimates, for example, would require consideration of all of the monetary costs and benefits of the use of a variation, including many costs and benefits not always perceptible; data could take years to unfold and, moreover, the estimates themselves might vary according to contextual circumstances. Therefore, no estimates of the cost benefits of the use of the various policy options appear. The criterion is retained on the worksheet that follows in order to stress the inappropriateness of its use here or elsewhere unless *all* monetary benefits and costs can be computed, either through the use of acceptable cost estimation procedures or, at a minimum, shadow pricing procedures.

The four remaining criteria—equity, adequacy, responsiveness, and appropriateness—also present major difficulties. Perhaps the most important consideration is determining the perspective from which the criteria should be judged. In this exercise, two choices are fairly clear: The criteria could be viewed from the perspective of the state or of the rural school district. These points of view would, at times, produce conflicting assessments about the *effects* of the use of the policy options (a consideration central to equity); about *whose needs, values, or opportunities* should be the focus (important to adequacy); about *who should benefit* (the intent of the responsiveness criterion); or about *who should judge* the worthiness of an option designed for the larger society (the appropriateness criterion).

Nonetheless, the challenge in the context of this discussion is to identify ways that the state can assist rural districts in meeting the needs of the 1990s; the assumption that underlies the challenge is that it is important for the state to act to strengthen its system of elementary-secondary education. For this reason, the perspective applied here is that of the rural school district.

Discussion of Hypothesized Effects

Table 10 illustrates the hypothesized effects of the use of the main variations of the eight policy options when judged from the perspective of the rural school district. A discussion of some of these illustrative estimates follows. Again, readers are cautioned not to view the given ratings as "research findings." They are merely illustrative.

Dunn (1981, p. 238) suggests that the criterion of appropriateness asks questions about the objectives of a policy, and, though difficult to define, must still be considered "prior to those of effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, and responsiveness." The objective of the use of each of the variations of policy options here is to contribute to the improvement of rural districts. So, the variations that are regarded to be of maximum support of that criterion are the four choices that would grant local districts substantial discretion-

Table 10
Hypothesized Effects of the Use of Policy Options When Judged Against Their Ability to Address State Policy Selection Criteria

State Policy Options Considered	State Policy Selection Criteria: Cost-Effectiveness	Cost-Benefit	Equity	Adequacy	Responsiveness	Appropriateness
Interdistrict Relations						
regional single-purpose schools	1	N/E	2	1	2	1
regional comprehensive secondary schools	2	N/E	2	2	2	2
sharing whole grade and/or staff	1	N/E	2	1	2	1
limited-purpose service center	1	N/E	1	1	2	1
comprehensive service centers	2	N/E	2	2	2	2
School District-Postsecondary Relations						
area community colleges offer voc/tech program	2	N/E	1	2	2	1
area colleges offer advanced placement courses	2	N/E	1	2	2	2
area college faculty offer technical assistance	1	N/E	1	2	2	1
area college facilities offer support services	1	N/E	1	2	2	1
School District-Other Local Interorganizational						
joint planning-other human services	1	N/E	1	1	2	1
joint planning-other community services	1	N/E	1	1	2	1
integration-other human services	1	N/E	1	1	2	1
integration-other community services	1	N/E	1	1	2	1
School District-Partnerships						
business and business organizations	1	N/E	1	1	2	1
civic, service, and religious organizations	1	N/E	1	1	2	1
private individuals, volunteer organizations	1	N/E	1	1	2	1
Direct State Services						
technical assistance-education	1	N/E	1	1	1	1
technical assistance-other human resources	1	N/E	1	1	1	1
state-operated regional instructional programs	2	N/E	1	1	-2	-2
state-operated regional instructional support	1	N/E	1	1	-2	-1
state-operated regional management support	1	N/E	1	1	-2	-1
Distance Learning Technologies						
noninteractive audio — instruction	2	N/E	1	2	3	3
noninteractive audio — instructional support	1	N/E	1	2	3	3
interactive audio — instruction	2	N/E	1	2	3	3
interactive audio — instructional support	1	N/E	1	2	3	3

(Continued next page)

Table 10
(Continued)

State Policy Options Considered	State Policy Selection Criteria					
	Cost-Effectiveness	Cost-Benefit	Equity	Adequacy	Responsiveness	Appropriateness
Changes in Financial Support Base						
weighted student enrollment factor	-1	N/E	3	2	3	3
inclusion of local effort and local ability	2	N/E	3	2	3	3
categorical aid for staff and capital outlay	2	N/E	3	2	3	3
regional equalization tax for core program	2	N/E	3	2	3	3
full-state funding for core program	1	N/E	2	2	3	2
Local District Discretionary Authority						
state curriculum goals	-1	N/E	2	2	3	3
state graduation requirements	-1	N/E	2	2	3	3
state staff certification requirements	-1	N/E	2	2	3	3
state requirements for length of day, week, year	-1	N/E	2	2	3	3

LEGEND:

- highly supportive (3) or highly nonsupportive (-3) of promoting achievement of criterion
- moderately supportive (2) or moderately nonsupportive (-2) of promoting achievement of criterion
- limited support (1) or limited nonsupport (-1) of promoting achievement of criterion
- neutral (0) — will not promote or inhibit
- N/E — no estimate established

ary authority, the five variations of changes in the financial support bases of the districts; and the use of the four distance learning technologies.

The use of these same three categories of options—distance learning technologies, changes in financial support bases, and local district discretionary authorities—also seems to fulfill well the responsiveness criterion, which is styled as "the extent to which alternative policies satisfy the needs, preferences, or values of those that are to benefit from the policy objective" (Dunn, 1981, p. 238). The use of all of the variations in these categories would provide important fiscal resources or critical program improvement.

In the case of these three options, the cost-effectiveness criterion accounts for the deficiencies in otherwise good showings. On the other hand, the following variations and options are all judged to be cost effective, when compared to the costs incurred by an individual district acting alone: school district-postsecondary relations, school district-other local interorganizational relations, direct state services, and distance learning.

Estimating Effects by Compatibility with Policy Instruments

The third and final approach used here considers the hypothetical impact of each policy option when viewed from the perspective of the primary policy instrument(s) required for implementation.

Procedures Used in the Estimations

The use of each of the state policy options and their main variations ordinarily carries with it certain benefits and costs. Those that receive prominence in the discussion that follows appear in Figure 5.

The implementation of each of the state policy options and their main variations will ordinarily require the use of certain combinations of policy instruments and the avoidance of others. In this exercise,

- the perceived need for the use of mandates is never combined with the perceived need for the use of inducements;
- the perceived need for the use of inducements is frequently combined with capacity-building and system-changing;
- the perceived need for the use of system-changing is frequently combined with capacity-building and inducements; and
- the perceived need for the use of the advocacy instrument is extensive and, where cited, is combined with the majority of all other policy instruments.

Discussion of Hypothesized Effects

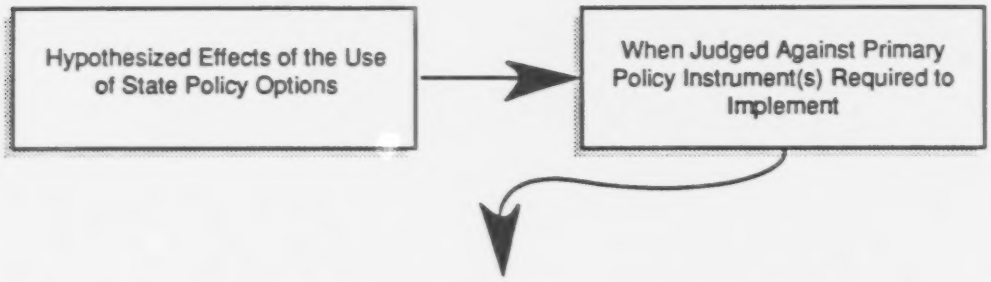
Table 11 illustrates the estimated effects relevant to policy instruments available to implement the eight major options. Some of these illustrative effects are considered below.

There are three situations in which the use of mandates would ordinarily be required to implement a variation of one of the policy options:

- those that entail the shared governance of a rural district with another organization or institution (as, for example, where complete integration of the rural district with other local human or community services occurs);
- those that entail heavy state involvement as the primary provider of services required to meet a state objective (as, for example, when the state provides direct instructional services to students, or becomes a major actor in the provision of instructional and management support services in the state system of schools); and
- those that represent substantial changes in the sources of funding for education and the ways in which contributions are to be computed (as, for example, for changes in the financial support base of rural districts).

In addition, mandates would be required to implement other variations, if the participation of a rural district is required, rather than permitted (as, for example, in the case of the establishment of a regional single-purpose or comprehensive secondary school); or where the involvement of some other public organization or institution is not optional (as, for

Figure 5
Focus of Approach #3: Hypothesized Effects of the Use of Policy Options When Judged Against Primary Policy Instrument(s) Required to Implement


Hypothesized Effects of the Use of State Policy Options
When Judged Against Primary Policy Instrument(s) Required to Implement

Major Benefits and Costs Given Prominence

Policy Instruments	Benefits Stressed	Costs Stressed
Mandates	specific benefits to districts; uniformity	authorizing legislation or by-laws; enforcement; minimum standards; conflict
Inducements	specific benefits to districts; additional fiscal resources	oversight costs; conflict
Capacity-Building	specific benefits to districts	additional fiscal resources required to build capacity
System-Changing	specific benefits to districts; gain in authority for new service provider	loss of authority for old service provider; additional resources required to build capacity
Advocacy	specific benefits to districts; political gain for advocate	political costs for advocate

Table 11
Hypothesized Effects of the Use of Policy Options When Judged Against Primary Policy Instrument(s) Required to Implement

State Policy Options Considered	Primary Policy Instrument(s) Required to Implement				
	Mandates	Inducements	Capacity-Building	System-Changing	Advocacy
Interdistrict Relations					
regional single-purpose schools		X	X	X	X
regional comprehensive secondary schools		X	X	X	X
sharing whole grade and/or staff		X	X	X	X
limited-purpose service center		X	X	X	X
comprehensive service centers		X	X	X	X
School District-Postsecondary Relations					
area community colleges offer voc/tech programs		X	X	X	X
area colleges offer advanced placement courses		X	X	X	X
area college faculty offer technical assistance		X	X	X	X
area college facilities offer support services		X	X	X	X
School District-Other Local Interorganizational					
joint planning-other human resources		X	X		X
joint planning-other community services		X	X		X
integration-other community services	X		X	X	X
integration-other community services	X		X	X	X
School District-Partnerships					
business and business organizations		X			X
civic, service, and religious organizations		X			X
private individuals, volunteer organizations		X			X
Direct State Services					
technical assistance-education			X		
technical assistance-other human resources		X			
state-operated regional instructional program	X		X	X	X
state-operated regional instructional support	X		X	X	X
state-operated regional management support	X		X	X	X
Distance Learning Technologies					
noninteractive audio — instruction			X		
noninteractive audio — instructional support			X		
interactive audio — instruction			X		
interactive audio — instructional support			X		

(Continued next page)

Table 11
(Continued)

State Policy Options Considered	Primary Policy Instrument(s) Required to Implement				
	Mandates	Inducements	Capacity-Building	System-Changing	Advocacy
Changes in Financial Support Base					
weighted student enrollment factor	X				X
inclusion of local effort and local ability	X				X
categorical aid for staff and capital outlay	X				X
regional equalization tax for core program	X			X	X
full-state funding for core program	X			X	X
Local District Discretionary Authority					
state curriculum goals	X				X
state graduation requirements	X				X
state staff certification requirements	X				X
state requirements for length of day, week, year	X				X

example, in the case of area community colleges offering vocational-technical education to secondary school districts).

Mandates require authorizing legislation or, in some states, enactment of state agency bylaws that have the effect of statute. Controversy would ordinarily ensue. Other costs of mandates include monitoring implementation procedures and establishing accountability. The need to carry out both roles places additional responsibilities on the state. The main benefit of mandating certain actions would ostensibly be to ensure equal benefits to all rural districts.

This illustrative assessment suggests implementing many policy options would require extensive use of a combination of the remaining four state policy instruments. The use of each of these combinations has certain benefits and costs.

All of the five variations of interdistrict relations and the four variations of postsecondary relations ordinarily would require inducements (both fiscal incentives and disincentives), capacity-building, system-changing, and advocacy. Some of the principal costs of these combinations are:

- added costs of inducements (although these might be partially offset by the transfer of "old" funds from an individual rural district to the new enterprise, for example, as the transfer of funds formerly expended by a rural district for vocational-technical programs to an area community college that would assume this responsibility);
- added investment costs either to create a new effective service provider (as, for example, in the case of the use of direct service technologies), or to retool existing organizations better to fulfill their expected new role (as, for example, the use of area college faculties and facilities to provide technical assistance and instructional and management support services);
- loss of authority that rural districts would experience from the transfer of programs that would be shared with other districts (as in the case of single-purpose or comprehensive service agencies) or moved entirely to another organization (as would likely be the case if an area college assumed responsibility for advanced placement courses); and
- expense and effort of providing strong state leadership (which could also entail the political costs of advocating unpopular variations—for example, changes in the way education is funded).

The final point deserves emphasis. Implementing many of the variations would inevitably require the strong advocacy of state leadership. In the case of individual leaders, loss of personal influence must be counted as a definite risk. Good leadership, of course, takes risks.

On the other hand, potential benefits from the use of a combination of policy instruments appears, in this illustration, to be significant. Their use in combination could result in the implementation of the variations, which in turn could lead to improvements in the quality of rural schools. And that would strengthen state systems as a whole.

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AFTERWORD:
Applying What We Know

At no time in American history has the need for an effective state system of elementary-secondary education been more in evidence. Rural school districts are a key part of the infrastructure of such systems, as the evidence presented by Dr. Stephens suggests. These districts, however, have been threatened by a convergence of socioeconomic and educational forces that will continue to exert pressure on them, well into the next century. If rural schooi districts are weak, effective state systems will be illusive.

Through the mid-1970s, state education agencies tended to respond to the apparent needs of rural districts by mandating the reorganization of rural districts with small enrollments. After a hiatus, state interest in reorganization—prompted in part by new economic stresses in and on small rural communities—may be increasing again. This book might have argued against the wisdom of resuming mandated reorganization, but, instead, it broadened the perspective and asked the question, "What are the alternatives?"

To develop these alternatives, this book showed why an ambitious new state policy response to the needs of rural districts is needed in the 1990s. In Chapters 2 through 5 the discussion developed a framework for viewing a dilemma that has traditionally been called "the rural school problem" (e.g., Cubberley, 1922). That framework includes:

- historical and contemporary realities,
- new priorities to focus state policy response,
- tools to judge the ends and means of policymaking, and
- major policy options that hold promise for rural districts.

A framework, however, is a structure rather than a process. For this reason, Chapter 6 illustrates one way—but only one way—in which policymakers might apply the framework to judge the strengths and weaknesses of the major policy options.

The important points to remember are that we *do know*:

- what the problems are,
- how to find the solutions, and
- how to fashion relevant policies.

A major task of this book has been to make those points clear.

But in all this we know something else, too: One size won't fit all. Policies must be fashioned to fit the conditions that affect rural, small schools differently within each state. Even as they struggle under the historic weight of of trying to adhere to the norms of the "one best system," small schools and districts demonstrate a remarkable ability to address the cognitive and affective development of students. Some recent studies (e.g., Friedkin & Necochea, 1988; Walberg & Fowler, 1987), moreover, suggest that small size has a generally positive influence on the academic achievement of at-risk students.

There is no end to the number of ways a state can effectively respond to the needs of rural education. The problems are not invisible; to apprehend them requires neither great wisdom nor insight on the part of policymakers. Solutions, in fact, seem to be within reach of those who possess sufficient resolve. Moreover, the new pressures and priorities considered in this book are hardly immune to argument or amendment; thinking about such matters, in fact, forms the *sine qua non* of the task.

This work, however, has nothing to do with misdirected sentiments or mistaken stereotypes about the rural past. Rural education affects *real* students and *real* educators whose efforts are vital to the welfare of the communities of which they are a part, and to the welfare of the various states and of the nation as a whole. Creative solutions must be fashioned to meet the challenges that rural school districts face, if, in the future, schools are to be worthy of the students and communities they serve.

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